

Conflict Update # 168

August 31st, 2022

Conflict Assessment

Russian losses – 47,900 (+350) soldiers killed and 143,700 injured, 1,974 (+20) enemy tanks, 4,312 (+18) armored combat vehicles, 1,091 (+12) artillery systems, 285 (+3) MLRS systems, 152 (+1) air defense systems, 234 (+0) warplanes, 204 (+1) helicopters, 849 (+2) UAVs of the operational-tactical level, 196 (+0) cruise missiles, 15 (+0) warships/cutters, 3,236 (+19) trucks and tankers, 76 fuel bowsers and 99 (+0) units of specialized equipment.

Key takeaways

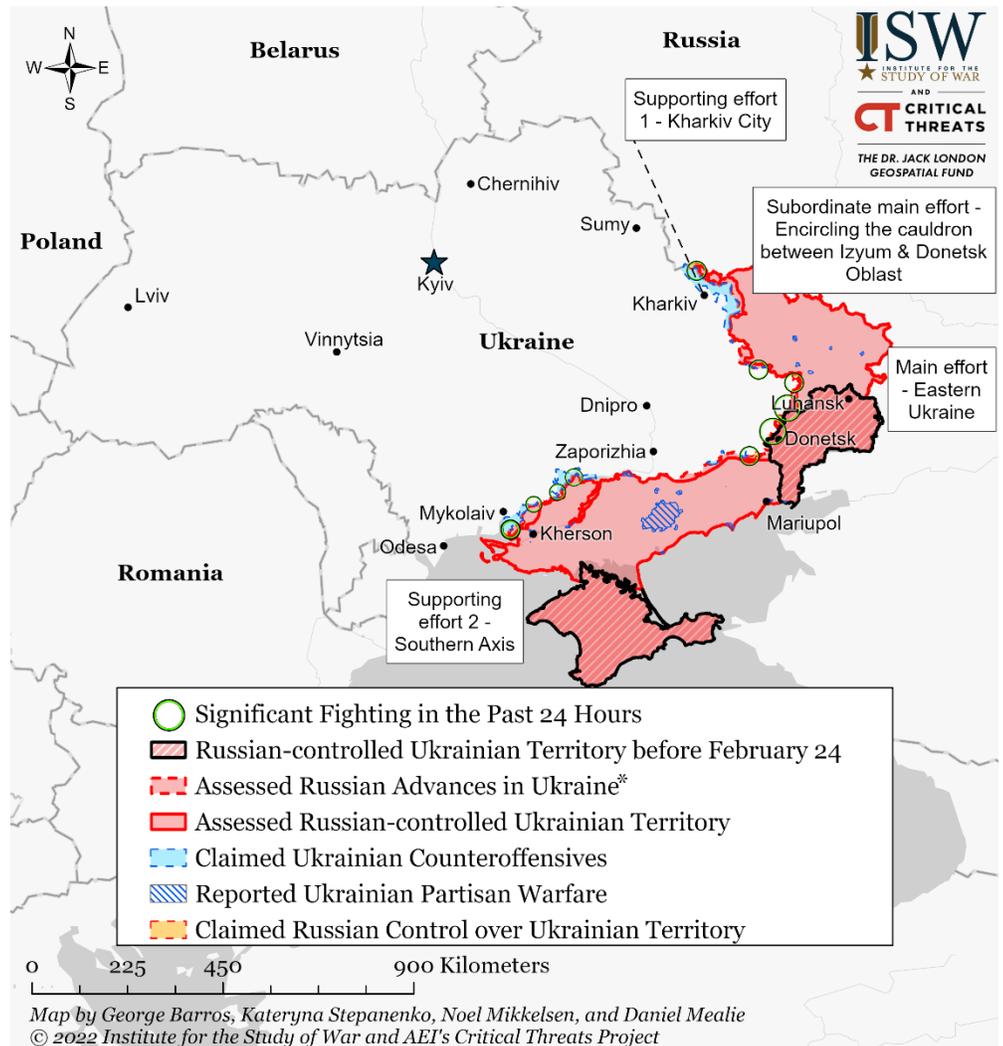
Ukraine pushes attack in south - Ukrainian forces have stepped up their counteroffensive to regain lost territory in the south, as Russia launched deadly strikes in central Ukraine and near the capital amid reports that Moscow has been increasingly facing a shortage of personnel in the east.

Ukraine's military said its planes struck five Russian strongholds around the city of Kherson and another nearby city in the south, where it is concentrating its biggest counteroffensive since the start of the war, seeking to isolate the Russian troops in the area.

"Ukrainian armored forces have continued to assault Russia's Southern Grouping of Forces on several axes across the south of the country since Monday," the UK's Ministry of Defence said on Wednesday.

"Ukrainian formations have pushed the front line back some distance in places, exploiting relatively thinly held Russian defenses."

The front lines between the two adversaries had remained largely unchanged for weeks, which meant that something of a stalemate had been reached.



The UK's new intelligence suggests that Ukraine's offensive, which had been teased for weeks and was announced on Monday, is making progress. Ukraine said on Monday that the counteroffensive had started Kherson and some other areas but did not give specifics.

Russian missile strikes also hit the regions of Kyiv, Chernihiv, Mykolayiv, and Kharkiv. The attack on the Kyiv region -- the first in weeks -- hit a military unit in a village on the outskirts of the capital, according to Oleksiy Hromov, a senior official with Ukraine's General Staff.

Ukraine 'shelling Russian supply ferries' on Dnipro River - Vicious battles are raging near Kherson in southern Ukraine after Kyiv announced the launch of a counter-offensive in the region.

It wants to push Russian troops out of Kherson -- captured in the early days of the war -- and back across the Dnipro River.

Ukraine said its forces had destroyed "a number of Russian ammunition depots" and "all major bridges" that allow vehicles to cross the Dnieper.

But Moscow said it had repelled Ukrainian "offensive attempts" in the Kherson region as well as in that of Mykolaiv, further west.

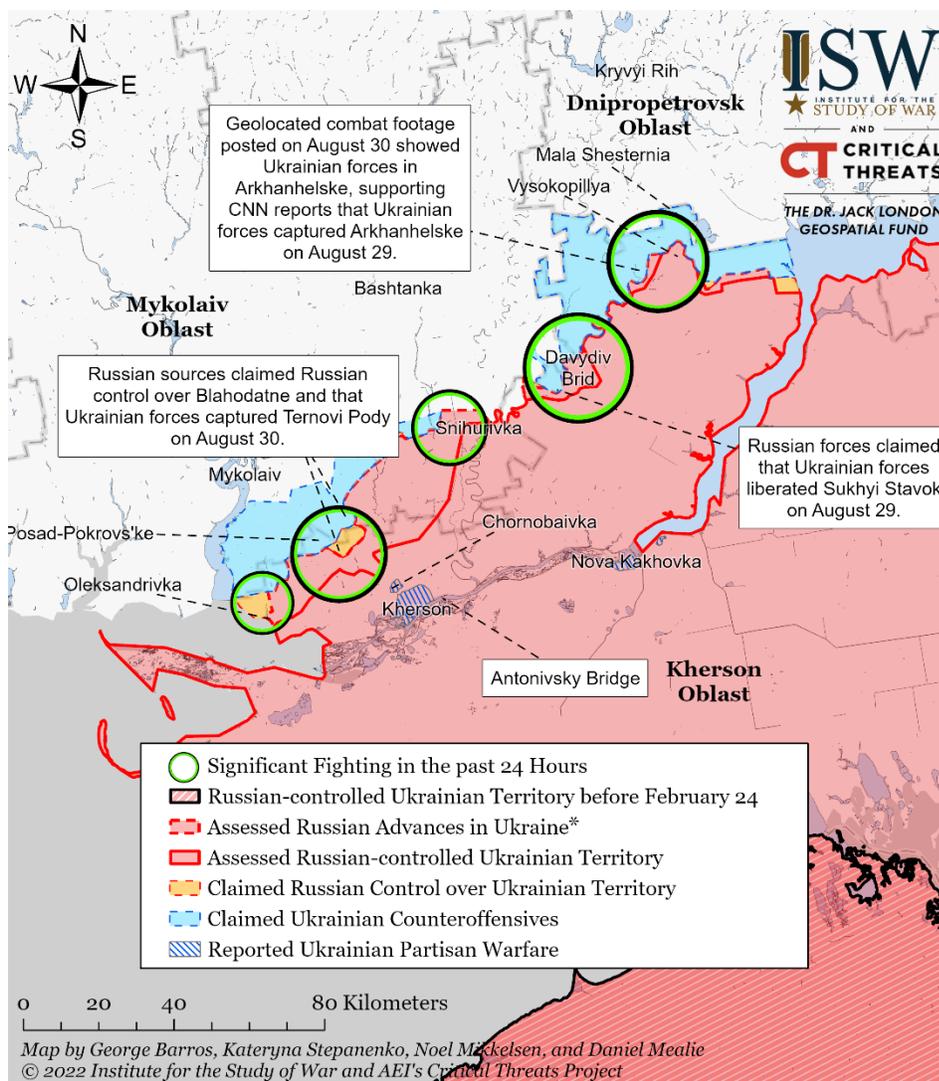
Russian morale falling in face of HIMARS, efficient air strikes – The morale of Russian troops in Ukraine is deteriorating as a result of attacks from Ukrainian HIMARS and warplanes, according to a senior U.S. military official.

This assessment was made during the latest Pentagon briefing on the situation in Ukraine on Monday, held by a "senior defense official" and a "senior military official", neither of whom were identified.

The military official said the U.S. has received "a good number of reports talking about the morale of the Russian soldier" around Kherson, which he described as "miserable".

Ukrainian forces kill 82 Russians, destroy 30 units of equipment - Ukraine's military says that it killed 82 Russian troops and destroyed at least 30 units of Russian equipment during fighting on Monday.

They said in a Tuesday Facebook post that the first day of a major counteroffensive on Russian positions in southern Ukraine had resulted in significant success, while Russian attacks on five Ukrainian positions were largely



"unsuccessful." Ukrainian forces are attempting to retake territory previously lost, including the city of Kherson, more than six months after the Russian invasion began.

"The situation in our operational area is steadily tense," OCS said in the post. "The enemy continues combat operations at the tactical level, tries to rotate units. The demonstration of force is carried out with the help of aviation. During the day, he attacked our positions 5 times, but was unsuccessful."

"Instead, last night our artillery units inflicted damage on 13 enemy control points in Kherson, Beryslav and Kakhovsky districts," it continued. "The enemy's air defense positions were attacked with six air strikes using various means of air attack."

OCS had said earlier on Monday that 41 Russian troops had been killed. In addition to doubling the number of Russian troops killed, OCS said that multiple Russian ammunition warehouses had been destroyed and reported an updated list of destroyed Russian equipment.

Ukraine says Kherson HIMARS strikes successful, could signal counter-attack - Ukrainian officials said that strikes using U.S.-supplied HIMARS weapons in the Russian-occupied city of Kherson overnight were successful and that it could pave the way for a counteroffensive to liberate the region.

Ukraine's "Kakhovka" task force credited High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS) with assisting its troops in destroying almost all the large bridges in the southern Kherson region.

"The situation in the temporarily occupied territory of the Kherson region is extremely difficult. Big and scary HIMARS have destroyed almost all the big bridges...", it said in a statement on Facebook, noting that only pedestrian crossings remain.

Russian military facing 'severe manpower shortages' - The US has determined that Russia is suffering "severe manpower shortages" in its six-month-old war with Ukraine and has become more desperate in its efforts to find new troops to send to the front lines, according to a new American intelligence finding disclosed Wednesday.

Russia is looking to address the shortage of troops in part by compelling soldiers wounded earlier in the war to return to combat, recruiting personnel from private security companies and even recruiting from prisons, according to a U.S. official who spoke to the AP on the condition of anonymity to discuss the downgraded intelligence finding.

The official added that the intelligence community has determined that one step that Russia's Defense Ministry is expected to take soon is recruiting convicted criminals to enlist "in exchange for pardons and financial compensation."

The U.S. government highlighted its finding as Russian President Vladimir Putin last week ordered the Russian military to increase the number of troops by 137,000 to a total of 1.15 million.

Putin

The noose tightens on Putin's ruinous reign - Back in the days when George H.W. Bush resided in the White House, he told me rather cryptically that I would be getting an invitation to the White House.

A few days later I had luncheon with his head of the CIA, Bob Gates, one of the brightest lights that I have ever known in government. Bob wasted no time getting down to business. He told me of his concern that the Russians, who were friendly with us in those days, were not going to have enough time to implement their economic reforms. He also spoke of the Russians' ardor to be recognized as part of the West.

A few more days passed and my invitation from the White House arrived. I was invited to dine at the White House and the guest of honor was Boris Yeltsin, the president of the Russian Federation.

Well, I thought back on my luncheon with Bob Gates and whether by accident or by Bob's plan, I concluded that this was an occasion for me to play diplomat. When I met Mr. Yeltsin in the receiving line at the White House, I told him what an honor it was for me to meet the representative of a great Western nation. The home of great writers, of great composers, of great cultural figures, and the nation that had partnered with us in beating the Nazis in World War II.

That did it. Boris was my friend for life or at least for the evening. I did not even have to mention that 10 months before, he had stepped down from a Soviet tank, which was my trump card.

In those days the Russians were our friends. The only sign of lingering hostility was that Boris's young aides that night did not wear black tie. Possibly they thought it was still too bourgeois. Possibly they did not own black tie. In those days the Russians were pretty down-at-the-heel. Not so today. Putin's contemporaries are all pretty snappy dressers, particularly his Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov.

Yet the war in Ukraine is going no better this week than it was in the recent past, and there is alarming news from the home front, alarming news for Mr. Putin.

Last week I suggested that Putin's domestic support is going to become impatient if his casualties continue at the catastrophic rate of 500 a day. Well now, they have. Moreover, there are attacks on his air force and there is talk of attacks on his navy and there is news that saboteurs have struck his forces in Crimea. It seems to me that there is hardly any good news out there for Mr. Putin.

Now there is evidence that the educated classes may be slipping away. Russians who work in IT are showing increased impatience with his war. The young are tiring of it and the educated classes such as IT workers who are mobile and can leave Russia are leaving, and at an alarming rate. They and other Russians are leaving the Motherland for places such as the former Soviet state of Georgia. International corporations are making use of their services.

The Wall Street Journal reports from Tbilisi, Georgia, that some 35,000 Russians have settled in the small Caucasus nation where they would rather pay their taxes than pay in rubles for Putin's war. Twenty-eight-year-old Irina Soloveva left her home in Russia two weeks into the war, and now she volunteers at a food bank in Georgia for Ukrainian refugees. "All I want to do is help Ukraine," she says. "Maybe this will help me atone." Atone? This sounds like a dedicated Russian opponent of the Moscow regime.

The number of people who share Soloveva's views is growing in Georgia and throughout the region. Said another woman, "It's soul-saving work" at Soloveva's food bank, and she prefers the work she does there to her previous job. She had worked in Russia for Russia Beyond, an English-language website promoting Russian culture. It was owned by RT, the Moscow-funded TV network. She explained further, "At the food bank people tell you about Mariupol, about everyone who died. You feel the tears coming down your face, and all you can say is, 'Here's some buckwheat.'" Yet hope is not lost. Said Viktor Ramin, a recent Russian emigre to Georgia, "The main thing I can do is stop paying taxes in Russia." Viktor has been relocated to Georgia by an international IT company. (R. Emmett Tyrrell Jr.).

Putin cronies threaten 'hundreds' of American coffins on live TV - On Russian state television, the initial bravado about conquering Ukraine in days has been replaced with poorly concealed desperation—and outright terrorist threats against the US. Experts on state-controlled television are now pondering whether US support for Ukraine will only change if "dozens or hundreds" of caskets draped in U.S. flags started arriving from all over the world.

During Tuesday's broadcast of the television show *The Meeting Place*, hosts and panelists discussed Ukraine's planned counteroffensive. While the Ukrainian will to defend their homeland is undeniable, the Kremlin's mouthpieces are firmly convinced that it could be overcome—if only Americans would get out of the way. With former U.S. President Donald Trump no longer in office, convincing Washington to see things Russia's way is not an option. As a result, Russian propagandists are now suggesting persuasion through violence.

How Putin botched the Ukraine war and put Russia's military might at risk - The Ukraine war has hit a shocking milestone: Six months after Vladimir Putin invaded, it's still on. Virtually nobody—and certainly not Putin himself—thought Ukraine could hold the mighty Russian military at bay, from late February through August, with only a moderate infusion of weapons from the West, some supportive declarations from Western leaders and a smattering of "We Stand with Ukraine" signs on U.S. lawns.

Ukrainian defenders have indeed been ferociously determined, while Russian troops have had to contend with bad battlefield leaders, inferior weapons and an unworkable supply chain.

They've also been hobbled by Putin himself. He misread the world situation and personally ordered a disastrous invasion, looking to overthrow the government in Kyiv. He directed a botched effort to take Donbas, depleting the Russian armed forces in the process.

He has ignored, overruled and fired his own generals (while another dozen have died in the war); and in fear of angering him, his generals have withheld key information from the Russian leader, according to U.S. intelligence officials who have been watching the war.

Putin has equally battled with the Russian people, cracking down on domestic freedoms and hiding the truth about Russian losses, moving the dead and injured under cover of darkness and delaying family notifications.

U.S. military and intelligence leaders tell Newsweek that they've been startled by much of what they've seen. But the most significant insight they've gleaned is the extent to which Russia's president undermines his own men.

"Putin, like every other dictator we've known in the modern era, thinks he knows better, more than his own military, and more than any experts," one senior intelligence official who works on Russia (and requested anonymity to speak frankly) tells Newsweek. Putin served only a few months in the Soviet military in 1975, reportedly in artillery, before becoming a long-serving KGB officer. As head of the Russian government for the past 22 years, he has been behind three wars on the periphery of the country, as well as operations in Syria.

Those wars fed his belief that he was Russia's top general, persuading him, as well, that the Russian armed forces had wholly modernized and updated, becoming infallible.

Now, the Russian leader's bad judgment and gigantic ego have become the greatest determinants of how the Ukraine war will end. Putin may survive losing the Ukraine war, but the Russian military has been decimated and the country brought to the brink of ruin.

The First Mistake

When President Putin gave the order to invade Ukraine, all U.S. intelligence agencies now agree, he was convinced the Russian army would be greeted with gratitude as they fanned out to liberate the waiting populace. Putin had been telling himself and the Russian people for so long that the two countries were one, with shared history, culture, religion and even language, he apparently started to believe it.

After grabbing Crimea and parts of Donbas in 2014, Putin planned a second invasion, thinking that Ukraine had weakened even more in eight years—led, as it was, by a literal former comedian whose most celebrated previous victory was on the Ukrainian version of Dancing with the Stars. The February invasion was designed to overthrow Volodymyr Zelensky and take over the entire country, and Russia deployed tens of thousands of troops in Belarus to Ukraine's north, threatening Kyiv.

Given Russia's overwhelming numerical superiority, Putin expected the government in Kyiv to fall in as little as 72 hours. In some ways, the West contributed to this mindset by loudly overestimating Russia's capacity for war and

underestimating Ukraine's ability to defend itself. But it was Putin alone who believed that Ukraine's weakness and his numbers meant a certain and swift victory.

The Kyiv front stalemated almost immediately. Everything about the assumptions of the Russian war plan fell apart. The ground force failed to move quickly enough, dependent as it was on clogged roads and quickly out-ranging its own supplies. Special forces and airborne troops landed and found themselves challenged and surrounded. Air and missile forces intended to disable Ukraine's defenses, mirroring American practice, missed their targets or did not apply enough (or the right) effort, failing in that mission as well.

"He thought he could establish his dominance over Ukraine very quickly," CIA Director William Burns said at the Aspen Security Forum last month. "It's hard not to see this as a strategic failure at this point for Putin and Russia."

No Plan B

As the war has gone on, Ukraine has managed to shift tactics, especially with its new Western arms and ammunition. "We do not have the resources to litter the territory with bodies and shells, as Russia does," Ukraine's Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov says. For Ukraine, he says, "it is necessary to change tactics, to fight in a different way."

Symbolically and literally, Ukraine's shift in strategy is being credited to its acquisition of the American HIMARS, the high-mobility artillery rocket system. In some ways, HIMARS is merely a euphemism for the entire panoply of U.S. and Western European supplied multiple rocket launchers (and long-range artillery), their most significant feature not necessarily being their range but their precision-ground rockets and projectiles. This allows less effort to have the same effects, as the long-range attacks on the Dnieper bridges and Russian bases have demonstrated.

But Putin remains stuck, unable or unwilling to respond to changed conditions on the ground. Russian soldiers and the supplies they need are increasingly in short supply, and Russian tactics, tightly controlled by the Kremlin, remain stubbornly frozen.

Putin is reported to be furious with his generals, multiple U.S. intelligence sources tell Newsweek. But the greatest miscalculation was his insistence that his forces open four separate fronts, in the north against the capital, in the east against Ukraine's second largest city Kharkiv, in the southeast against Donbas and in the far southwest driving toward the Ukrainian heartland and the port city of Odesa. In this expansive strategy assuming rapid victory, Putin wasn't interested in longer-range war planning. He had no Plan B.

Now, Moscow can't increase the number of its missile strikes because it has already depleted its overall supply. It can't increase air strikes into Ukraine's own rear because its planes are still vulnerable to air defenses (and their performance hasn't impressed).

His ground forces have lost more than a third of their capacity and don't have any blitzkrieg left in them. This largely leaves short-range artillery and rockets to mete out damage before troops inch forward. Russia does not have unlimited capacity to wage war, and though Putin has continued to drive the armed forces in its dogged frontal attack, it is ultimately a losing strategy.

Ukraine, moreover, despite its heavy losses, is now able to mobilize seven times as many troops as Russia has on the ground—so much so that manpower is no longer an issue for Kyiv. Ukraine's pool of military manpower has always been larger than it's been portrayed by the news media, and the country has been inundated with volunteers.

Many Western observers seem to miss the fact of Ukraine's superiority here, still living in an era when America was fighting Saddam Hussein and his "fourth largest army in the world." Observers should know by now that numbers can be deceiving and should have learned also to appreciate the impact of modern weapons. A military can shoot a lot of

artillery or drop a lot of bombs in a conflict, but a few well-aimed weapons, hitting the right targets, has a greater effect. Ukraine now excels at this.

"Putin was wrong in his assumptions about breaking the alliance and breaking Ukrainian will," Burns says. And because things have gone so wrong on the ground, Burns says, the CIA believes Putin "has shrunk his objectives." Putin is no longer seeking to take over Ukraine or hold territory beyond Donbas.

Trust Fail

Barely three weeks into the war, Putin made the decision to withdraw from the Kyiv front. He fired battlefield commanders and even installed a new general as commander-in-chief in the south. He fought with his own intelligence chief and defense minister and sidelined naysayers and skeptics, according to multiple U.S. government sources.

And then he made things even more complicated: He undermined the plan to advance on the Donbas front to capture territory—the central mission—by insisting on expanding the southern goal, declaring that all of Ukraine along the Black Sea coast would be taken.

The move widened the trust gap between Putin and the uniformed military, said Lt. General Sir Jim Hockenhull, director of British military intelligence, in early August.

"Political meddling by the Kremlin is taking its toll," a senior American military intelligence official, granted anonymity to speak candidly, tells Newsweek. "Putin screams for more innovation while at the same time insisting on strict centralization of decision-making. Without decentralization and openness to accepting initiative and risk on the battlefield, you're back to a rigid strategy. Thus the reversion back to Russian reliance on firepower, long-range strikes by artillery, MRLs [multiple rocket launchers] and missiles." Russia is lumbering forward while causing great damage as a result. There is no chance to get behind the Ukrainian defenders.

Putin's flaws and failures have been significant, but the war has also been a merciless disrobing for the Russian military.

Though much was written in the past few years about Russia's new "hybrid warfare" doctrine—combining its numerical advantage in troops with its special operations and cyberwarfare—none of that has made much of a difference in Ukraine.

The rest of the traditional armed forces—the tanks, infantry and artillery arms—have meanwhile been debilitated by systemic problems. According to observers of the Russian military, widespread corruption, an archaic and damaging hazing system and a ruthless assignment policy that ignores the fatigue and mental state of those fighting has left an exhausted, fearful, demotivated and insubordinate ground force. The number of soldiers who have walked away from the battlefield or refused to fight is at epidemic levels, according to intelligence observers. Many thousands of Russian troops have been killed or wounded in Ukraine; the Russian Ministry of Defense is at the bottom of the barrel in terms of finding and strong-arming people to serve, offering bonuses and benefits and yet still failing to man the force.

Though there has been much criticism of Russian mercenaries—especially those from the private Wagner group who have augmented the uniformed armed forces and employ more brutal tactics—they have become integral to the war effort. Moscow is bringing in contractors precisely to avoid the paperwork and the laws that govern conscription, soldier rights and pay.

They have also raised Chechen and other "volunteer" battalions, many of which have been mustered outside the laws governing contracts and conscripts. And with so many young Russian men and women declining to fight in Ukraine, Russia is trying to entice prisoners and other disadvantaged civilians to join, granting them special pay and veteran status immediately upon their arrival.

Putin is also instituting a new nationwide youth movement reminiscent of the Pioneers of the Soviet era—a program that U.S. intelligence says is aimed as much to militarize society and create support for the armed forces as it is to counter the growing infiltration of global media and Western culture into Russia.

Press and internet freedoms are increasingly being targeted on the pretense that a free press is promoting "fake news" about Ukraine. Any sympathies citizens might express for the human cost of the war is being blamed on "excessive permissiveness" in society. Thousands of anti-war demonstrators have been arrested since the war began. The effect of Putin's crackdowns on Russian society is difficult to gauge, but U.S. intelligence officials tell Newsweek that the CIA sees that Russians who can afford to leave the country are leaving, with the number of those who left and didn't return doubling year over year—as many as two million people since the war began.

The Nuclear Option

With an inability to change strategy on the ground and lacking the manpower and equipment to further escalate, Putin can accept negotiations or disingenuously declare victory. Or he could believe that a nuclear demonstration is his best path to victory (or survival).

Putin's nuclear weapons continue to be watched "very, very closely," Sir John Hockenhull said earlier this month.

U.S. leaders have worked to lower the nuclear temperature and rhetoric from the beginning of the conflict, quietly pressuring Kyiv not to attack targets on Russian soil for fear of escalation. This led to a tactical advantage for Moscow, able to attack (and supply its forces) from a Belorussian and Russian sanctuary, just miles across the Ukrainian border.

In that way, nuclear weapons are effective: Putin's nukes have limited Ukraine and deterred the West from directly intervening.

On the other hand, it's very difficult to imagine Putin ordering their use. There is no military target lucrative or important enough to merit a nuclear weapon. Three-quarters of a million Ukrainian troops are spread out along a 1,500-mile-long front line, throughout the rear, and in Ukraine's many military and air bases. Compare that with some 15 million men facing each other on the front line in the Nazi Germany-Soviet European front in World War II. It was in this age of mass on the battlefield that the entire notion of "tactical" nuclear weapons was born.

The flaw in the thinking of nuclear advocates is in transposing these historic battlefields today, despite the fact that Russian forces barely number 110,000 soldiers on the ground in Ukraine. The ominous description of the Ukraine war as the "largest battle since World War II" perpetuates the view that nuclear weapons have battlefield utility. The mystery is whether Putin himself also believes that a nuclear weapon could be a war winner.

'Next Year'

Russia ended its decade-long war in Afghanistan in 1989. Will that withdrawal be the model for Ukraine? From the 72 hours to the weeks and then months of the war, Putin's army has consistently been portrayed as always moving forward while Ukraine is portrayed as barely holding its own, living on borrowed time.

This picture of Ukraine's desperation has helped President Zelensky achieve the most important goal as Ukraine regrouped after the initial onslaught: bolstering his plea for the West to send arms and assistance before it was too late. In fact, it is Moscow that is scrambling to avoid another humiliating defeat both in the south and west.

Ever since the Russian withdrawal from the Kyiv region, and the start of Putin's second offensive in Donbas almost four months ago, Russia has been unable to deliver any knockout blow.

It scored territorial victories in Severodonetsk and Lysychansk (at great human cost) and then took most of the Luhansk region, but Putin's army then stalled again into a stalemate. When Russian ground troops have moved forward, it has

been at an excruciatingly slow pace and at great cost, the ebb and flow of warfare steadily weakening Moscow's demoralized force.

U.S. and NATO intelligence agree that Ukraine has suffered as many deaths and injuries as Russia, but the morale of the defending force remains strong. And while Putin sends exhausted Russian soldiers into the meat grinder, Ukraine has managed to bring in fresh troops and units, many of its strategic shifts specifically intended to protect and preserve Ukrainian soldiers on the ground.

With Putin at the helm, the fighting to take the other half of Donbas (the Donetsk region) has been more bombing than bullets. With its forces held back on the ground, Russia has reverted to its historic way of war, conducting air and missile strikes, firing rockets, and pounding Ukraine's defenders with thousands of artillery shells daily. Ukraine has always been out-gunned here, but with new Western supplies it is increasingly able to engage in long-range strikes, applying quality over quantity, precision over brute force.

Further to the southwest of Donbas, the battlefield looks different. Russia is stuck on the ground and losing territory, its positions west of the wide Dnieper River cut off because Ukraine has managed to damage or destroy the major road and rail bridges over the river, severing Russian forces from supplies. U.S. intelligence observes Russia moving additional forces to the area, but also assesses that the 25,000 Russian troops west of the river are on the verge of being isolated.

Ukraine's shift—from holding the front lines to starving off Russia's front line forces by hitting their supplies—is ironically also prolonging the war. Attrition is no longer just a matter of killing troops and tanks on the front lines. Ukraine is attacking ammunition depots and supplies, fuel and other necessities of war behind the front lines.

Ukrainian Maj. General Dmytro Marchenko, a commander in the south, told RBC Ukraine, "Kherson will be liberated 100 percent." Marchenko isn't offering any specific dates when the Ukrainian counteroffensive in the Kherson region will bear fruit. "I would not like to make predictions," he says. "But if we have the amount of weapons that we were promised that we actually need, then, I think, we will celebrate victory in the spring of next year."

Putin thought the war would be over long ago. His tough and determined foes are looking ahead with confidence: "next year." (William Arkin).

No draft for Russia - Putin has been waging its war on Ukraine "with a military that is essentially at peacetime strength," and has resisted all calls for instituting a draft to beef up the force during this so-called "special military operation," NYT's Anton Troianovski reports Wednesday. In a quote reminiscent of the Iraq surge-era feeling by the U.S. military that "We're at war; America's at the mall," Putin supporter and former separatist leader Aleksandr Borodai told Troianovski that the Russian troops are "losing their health, sometimes dying," while "the whole rest of the country, in whose interests the people at the front are fighting, is living an absolutely relaxed life and many people think that nothing is happening at all."

Humanitarian

Thousand Ukrainian children given 'new families' in Russia: ISW - Russia forcibly resettled more than 1,000 Ukrainian children from the occupied Mariupol region to be adopted by Russian families—a move that amounts to genocide, a U.S. think tank said Wednesday.

The Institute for the Study of War (ISW) cited a now-deleted Russian government post that showed that Russia is bringing Ukrainian children to the country and paying Russian families to adopt them.

An archived version of the Russian federal subject (region) Krasnodar Krai's Family and Childhood Administration post details a program under which Russian authorities transferred over 1,000 children from Mariupol to Tyumen, Irkutsk, Kemerovo and Altay Krai.

The regional government stated in its post that over 300 children are still waiting to "meet their new families" and that citizens who decide to adopt these children will be given a one-time payment by the state under federal law.

"More than 300 babies are temporarily kept in specialized institutions of the Krasnodar Territory and are looking forward to meeting their new families," the post said.

According to the post, the "allowance" is assigned to each adopted child. It notes that from February this year—the month Russia's war against Ukraine began—the lump sum allowance for each adopted child is 20,472.77 rubles (\$342).

The one-time payment offered by the state is significantly higher when adopting a disabled child, a child over 7 years old, or adopting brothers or sisters simultaneously, at 156,428.66 rubles (\$2,614.77).

At the same time, the ISW said that Ukraine's Main Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported that 30 Ukrainian children from Khartsyzk, Ilovaysk and Zuhres in occupied Donetsk Oblast were transferred by Russian officials to Nizhny Novgorod under the guise of having them participate in youth educational-training programs.

The forcible transfer of children from one group to another "with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group" is a violation of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, the ISW noted.

Impact

Nuclear inspectors have arrived in Ukraine - and soon should be able to provide an assessment of the danger posed by the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant, the New York Times and Reuters reported separately Tuesday from Kyiv. Rafael Grossi, head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, said Wednesday that the first part of the inspection mission will take "a few days," but the team may need to stay longer, depending on the situation at the plant, Reuters reported.

War protest: Statues fall as Europe purges Soviet monuments - In the Latvian capital of Riga, an obelisk that soared high above a park to commemorate the Soviet Army's capture of that nation in 1944 was toppled last week. It crashed into a pond to the cheers of those watching.

Days earlier in Estonia, a replica of a Soviet tank with the communist red star was removed by cranes and trucked away to a museum — one of up to 400 destined for removal. And in Poland, Lithuania and Czechia, monuments to the Red Army have been coming down for months, a belated purge of what many see as symbols of past oppression.

Russia's war on Ukraine has given a renewed push to topple the last remaining Soviet monuments in nations that regained their sovereignty from Moscow more than three decades ago. These countries now belong to NATO and the European Union and are staunch supporters of Ukraine.

At the end of the communist era, when Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia regained their independence from the Soviet Union and Poland and its neighbors rejected Moscow-backed communism, those nations began renaming streets and purging the most hated symbols, including statues of Soviet founder Vladimir Lenin and other communist bosses. Many of these relics are now housed in museums.

US Army to launch offensive cyber capabilities office - The U.S. Army will establish an office dedicated to offensive cyber and space capabilities next year amid rapidly shifting priorities, officials said.

The office, dubbed Program Manager Cyber and Space, will fall under the Program Executive Office for Intelligence, Electronic Warfare and Sensors, which tests and fields equipment such as aerial jamming pods, biometric information systems and battlefield navigation tools.

Shocking lessons US military leaders learned by watching Putin's invasion - Russia's military is weak and backwards.

His invasion of Ukraine produced this paradigm-shifting surprise—one that should transform the West's view of Russia's prowess, the threat that the country represents, and the Kremlin's future in the global arena.

After just one day of fighting, Russia's ground force lost most of its initial momentum, undermined by shortages of fuel, ammunition and even food, but also because of a poorly trained and led force. Russia began to compensate for the weaknesses of its land army with more long-range air, missile and artillery strikes. And Putin resorted to a nuclear threat—a reaction, U.S. military experts say, to the failure of Moscow's conventional forces to make quick progress on the ground.

Other military observers are flabbergasted that a Russian invasion force, fully prepared and operating from Russian soil, has been able to move just tens of miles into an adjoining country. One retired U.S. Army general told Newsweek in an email: "We know that Russia has a plodding army, and that Russian military force has always been a blunt instrument, but why risk the antipathy of the entire planet if you have no prospect of achieving even minimal gains." The Army general believes that the only explanation is that the Kremlin overestimated its own forces.

"I believe that at the heart of Russian military thinking is how Marshall Zhukov marched across Eastern Europe to Berlin," a former high-level CIA official told Newsweek in an interview. Zhukov's orders were to "line up the artillery and ... flatten everything ahead of you," he says. "'Then send in the peasant Army to kill or rape anyone left alive.' Subtle the Russians are not."

In the short term, Russia's military failures in Ukraine increase the threat of escalation, including the possibility of the use of nuclear weapons. But in the longer term, if escalation doesn't worsen and the Ukrainian conflict can be contained, Russian conventional military weakness upends many assumptions that geopolitical strategists—even those inside the U.S. government—make about Russia as a military threat.

For the United States and the West, the stumbling Ukraine invasion recalls the collapse of the Soviet Union, an eye-opening moment when it became clear that a supposedly unstoppable military shrouded a crumbling economy and a weak political and human base.

It seems, three decades later, that few lessons have been learned. Moscow continues to invest in hardware at the cost of ignoring the human dimension of warfare (and the human dimensions of the strength of the nation state). Russian leaders have also ignored the reality that success in the information age—even military success—demands education, open initiative and even freedom.

U.S. military analysts and experts extracted several lessons as they watched Russia's invasion of Ukraine unfold last week. On Thursday at about 4:00 a.m. local time, Russia invaded Ukraine along four main axes, attacking Ukraine's capital Kyiv from Belarus in the north, just 70 miles away, and from Russian soil further east, moving westward towards the country's largest city (some 2.5 million inhabitants).

The second axis bore down on Kharkiv, Ukraine's second largest city (population 1.4 million), less than 20 miles from the Russian border. The third attack entered Ukraine from Russian-occupied Crimea and the Black Sea in the south, to the east of Odessa, Ukraine's third largest city (population 1 million). The fourth axis in the east pushed westward through Luhansk and attacked from Russian-dominated Donbas.

Simultaneous with the ground invasion, 160 Russian missiles attacked targets from air, land, and sea. Some 80 Russia bombers and fighter planes accompanied those strikes, attacking in two primary waves. Altogether in about 400 attacks in the first 24 hours, the strike force hit, according to U.S. intelligence sources and reports on the ground, 15 command control nodes and military headquarters, 18 air defense installations, 11 airfields, and six military bases.

It wasn't an overwhelming attack.

But most Western analysts assumed that Russia just needed to pave the way for its ground forces to seize the capital and topple the government. And follow-on attacks would be coming, especially given that only a small fraction of Russian air and missile forces were employed in the Day One attack.

By the end of the day on Thursday, Russian ground forces moved into Ukraine, backed up by their own shorter-range artillery and missile strikes, and special forces and saboteurs, both in uniform and in civilian clothes, showed up in Kyiv city center.

Paratroopers were airlifted ahead of the main ground force into Hostomel airfield on the northwestern edge of Kyiv's suburbs. The greatest progress was made in the northeast corner of Ukraine, on a straight line from Russian Belgorod to Kyiv. It was a second axis pointing at the capital city, the Russian force starting about 200 miles away.

But then the weaknesses of Russia conscript army, its military equipment, and its over-optimistic strategy began to show. Perhaps most significant was the battle at Hostomel, the airfield north of Kyiv, and key to Russia's effort to quickly overthrow the democratic government of Ukraine and achieve "regime change." Russian airborne troops carried by helicopters landed at the airfield in the early morning hours on Thursday to create a stepping stone into the city. But by the end of the day, Ukrainian defenders had regained control.

Meanwhile, the forward edge of the main force of Russian troops got bogged down 20 miles north of Kyiv. Heading south along the west bank of the Dnieper river, which extends from the Belarus border and splits the Ukrainian capital, tanks and armored vehicles slowed the advance. Russian logistical resupplies faltered.

Ukrainian ground defenders, as well as Ukrainian fighter jets, attacked the advancing force and scored unexpected victories. Russia's land army proved ineffective, as numerous stories of confused and unmotivated soldiers emerged. Meanwhile, the Ukrainian military and the Ukrainian people's defense exceeded all expectations. Babushkas armed with broomsticks were defeating the Russian Army: that became the dominant narrative.

With the exception of long-range strikes, almost everything about the initial salvos of the Russian invasion failed.

Ukrainian air defenses were not disabled. Ukrainian airfields were not put out of action. Ukrainian defenders were able to hold their ground and move largely unfettered around the country. Ukrainian reserves and civilian defenders rapidly mobilized. Russian airborne and special forces inserted deep inside Ukraine were isolated from the main Russian force on the ground, cut off from the basics, especially ammunition resupply.

Comment – Ukrainian forces were extremely mobile, with motorcycle riders moving rapidly between Russian outposts and armed with shoulder-mounted anti-tank missiles. They would destroy the front and back vehicles and then systematically move down the line. They particularly targeted fuel and food supply trucks together with identified command posts, leaving the advancing invading forces without supplies and rudderless.

Importantly, Russia was not able to integrate any of the modern instruments of warfare—electronic warfare, cyber, space—into the military attack. In Ukraine, the electricity was also still flowing, and the telecommunications infrastructure (including the internet) was in full swing.

U.S. intelligence sources pointed out to Newsweek that while Russian ground forces have been surprisingly sluggish and uncoordinated, they were also severely constrained in their initial attack by the Kremlin's strategy and objectives.

"There's only so much civil infrastructure one can destroy if the intention is occupation of the country," says one U.S. Air Force officer who was involved in the planning for the 2003 Iraq war. Also, in arguing that Ukraine is an integral part of Russia, Moscow could not overtly and directly attack the Ukrainian people, military observers say.

Russia may have also been seeking to maintain some semblance of goodwill with the international community (and even with the Ukrainian population) in not intentionally attacking civilians or civilian objects. The Ukrainian government claimed that only 32 civilian objects were hit on the first day of attacks, almost all of them by accident. By the end of the weekend, that number was still low, and Ukrainian health officials said that some 300 civilians had died and another 1,000 were wounded. Though there have been numerous incidents where civilian objects were hit, none so far appear to be intentional; the proportion of civilian casualties and harm is on par with that of the United States in its high-intensity air wars.

Comment – for some reason the writer has omitted mention of Mariupol which was completely flattened and from where thousands of Ukrainians have been forcefully removed to far-flung Russian settlements with children being put up for adoption by Russian families, as mentioned in another article in today's Update. No mention either of the massacres in Bucha.

A total of 150,000 Russian invaders may sound impressive, another analyst says, but that force pushed into Ukraine from about 15 different locations, dividing up the power of each individual attack. The analyst says that such a multipronged approach demonstrates another overestimation on the part of Moscow, that the country could be quickly occupied.

The undignified fall of Russia's once-dignified diplomatic corps - Russian diplomats were once viewed with begrudging respect in the West. Now they're seen as irrelevant mouthpieces for Putin's war in Ukraine.

Russia's February invasion of Ukraine stunned the world as it ignited the biggest land war in Europe since World War II.

Also stunned, it turns out, was at least one of Moscow's own diplomats, who had been left in the dark about his president's revanchist ambitions in Ukraine.

"I didn't believe that the invasion would take place, I wanted to believe that it was a diplomatic game," Boris Bondarev, a former Russian diplomat who served at Moscow's mission to the United Nations in Geneva until earlier this year, told Foreign Policy.

But if there is any other outrage or protest over the war within Russia's foreign ministry—or the numerous war crimes that Russian forces are accused of having committed in Ukraine—it's nearly impossible to find. Bondarev is to date the only Russian diplomat to have resigned publicly in protest against the war.

In the weeks leading up to the invasion, senior Russian envoys across the West repeatedly dismissed the warnings of a Ukraine invasion as Western fear-mongering or overblown conspiracies emanating from Washington. "There is no invasion and there is no such plans," Anatoly Antonov, Russia's ambassador to Washington, said in a rare public interview with CBS News on Feb. 20—just four days before the invasion.

In short, Russian envoys committed either one of two cardinal sins of diplomacy: blatantly lying in a way that would be obviously disproved or revealing that they were completely cut out of their own government's entire decision-making process.

For Western diplomats, the conclusion is simple: Russia's foreign ministry just isn't what it used to be. Moscow's once-storied diplomatic corps, which produced some of Europe's toughest and most effective diplomats throughout history, has been reduced to a hollowed-out institution composed of little more than propagandists, spies masquerading as diplomats, and bureaucratic automatons.

Russian diplomats are fully cut out of the “power vertical” with “no ability to influence decisions by the Kremlin,” said one senior European diplomat, who spoke to Foreign Policy on condition of anonymity, as he was not authorized to speak to the press. “Meetings with them are surreal, they’re not able to discuss [or] admit actual facts, they trash talk about ‘Nazis’ in Ukraine, how NATO wants to invade Russia,” the official added. These days, he said, meetings with Russian diplomats are “often a waste of time.”

“It’s like they’ve completely lost their mojo, and they’ve lost the ability to put out messaging that could influence foreign audiences,” said Scott Rauland, a former U.S. diplomat who served as consul general in Yekaterinburg, Russia, in the mid-2000s and later as the acting U.S. ambassador to Belarus. “The lies that Russia’s ambassadors and embassies are promoting now are atrocious, are offensive ... it’s like a whole different institution than the one I dealt with,” he added. “I don’t know they will ever be able to regain the type of professional respect they once had.”

How the Ukraine war has pushed Taiwan to better prepare for crises - Taiwan has beefed up its training of reservists since the Ukraine war started and is raising awareness about the value of civil defense. Experts say new programs can better prepare Taiwanese for potential crises.

As the war in Ukraine enters its seventh month, people in Taiwan are starting to feel an urgency to be prepared for all eventualities amid escalating military pressure from Beijing.

In recent months, authorities and civil society organizations in Taiwan have initiated a series of reforms and island-wide trainings that are designed to enhance Taiwanese people's combat readiness and their abilities to deal with any potential crises.

One of the organizations at the leading edge of this effort is Forward Alliance, an NGO aimed at improving Taiwan's national resilience.

Containment

More military aid for Ukraine - The White House is focused on making sure Ukrainians have the "information" and "tools" they need to effectively counter Russia, NSC's John Kirby told reporters earlier today, adding that the White House will announce more security assistance for Ukraine "in the coming days." The Biden administration has already promised more than \$13 billion in military aid to Ukraine in the six months since Russia's initial invasion.

Pentagon outlines \$200 million plan to accelerate HIMARS production - The Pentagon has said a \$200 million plan to expand and accelerate production of High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems, or HIMARS, is in motion.

Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition William LaPlante spoke about the plan after a visit to Lockheed Martin facilities in Camden, Arkansas that produce HIMARS and Guided Multiple Launch Rocket Systems (GMLRS), according to a news release from the Department of Defense (DoD).

Ukraine is "effectively employing" the lightweight mobile launchers and precision-strike munitions produced in the facilities, it said.

Is Washington about to provide ATACMS weapons to Ukraine? - The Ukrainian military announced the beginning of a much-anticipated counteroffensive on Monday, aiming to retake territory in the country's south.

Western weapons, which have helped them strike high-value targets behind the front lines as part of a strategy to degrade Russia's ability to hold the territory it has seized, have made their counteroffensive possible and could be decisive in determining its outcome. That's why Washington should provide Ukraine with the Army Tactical Missile System (pictured right) without delay.

U.S. provision of ATACMS would allow Kyiv to strike key logistics nodes and other high-value targets beyond the range of Ukraine's current precision-strike capabilities. Some worry that providing the new capability to Ukraine could precipitate Russian escalation, but that risk is overstated and can be mitigated by requiring Kyiv to use ATACMS only against Russian military targets on Ukrainian territory, including the Donbas and Crimea.



Such a condition could accompany the shipment of ATACMS if the Biden administration deems it necessary. Kyiv has already proven it can responsibly and effectively employ U.S.-supplied systems ranging from Javelin missiles to the High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems, and Washington has good reason to believe Kyiv would employ ATACMS in the same manner.

ATACMS is a short-range ballistic missile that can be fired from HIMARS as well as from the multiple-launch rocket systems Ukraine has received from the United Kingdom and Germany. Modern ATACMS variants have a range of up to 300 kilometers (186 miles) and carry a 500-pound unitary warhead, hitting targets at well over three times the range of the Guided Multiple Launch Rocket System rounds Ukraine is already using to great effect, with a warhead approximately 2.5 times the size of the existing unit.

The additional capabilities provided by ATACMS would allow Ukraine to strike high-value targets farther behind the front lines with greater ease, frequency and effectiveness. The Aug. 9 attack on Saki air base in Crimea, which damaged or destroyed roughly half the combat aircraft of the Black Sea Fleet's 43rd Independent Naval Attack Aviation Regiment, shows the potential of deep strikes against Russian forces and facilities.

Striking air bases and ammunition depots used by Russian forces in Ukraine (including in Crimea) would degrade Moscow's ability to sustain its forces and oppose Ukraine's new counteroffensive. bigger.

Additionally, ATACMS could help degrade Russia's long-range strike capabilities, which have been used to systematically target Ukrainian cities.

Likewise, Ukrainian forces could use ATACMS to hold at risk docked Russian naval vessels and infrastructure at Russia's base in Sevastopol, undermining Russia's ability to conduct sea-launched missile strikes and to enforce its blockade of Ukraine's Black Sea ports.

ATACMS strikes against higher-echelon Russian command-and-control nodes located beyond GMLRS range could disorganize Russian forces. And destroying S-300 and S-400 surface-to-air missile systems would enable the Ukrainian Air Force to operate more effectively.

Ukrainians train in the U.K. and battle balloons - Ukrainian troops are training with the British military and up to 10,000 new recruits have been and are undergoing training for several weeks each to help in their country's fight against Russia.

About 1,050 British service personnel are being deployed to run the programme, which will take place at four undisclosed MoD sites across the north-west, south-west and south-east of the UK.

Biden wants to block another Crimea-style land grab by Russia - US officials have been warning for weeks now that Russia is preparing to conduct sham referenda in Ukrainian territories Russian forces have seized. But what was once a future concern is now a present danger as two US officials told The Daily Beast, who cautioned the potential referendum—or multiple referenda, one for each occupied territory—could happen as early as October. The Crimea-esque step by the Russians will likely pose a key test of whether the Biden administration has learned anything from Russia's Ukraine takeover playbook.

The sources said that members of the U.S. intelligence community are currently speculating that the referenda could take place on or near Defenders Day on Oct. 14, a major Ukrainian public holiday that was first created in response to the invasion and occupation of Crimea and which honors the country's armed forces and veterans.

"We expect Russia to try to manipulate the results of these referenda under the false claim of the Ukrainian people wanting to join Russia. It will be critical to call out and counter this disinformation in real time," John Kirby, a White House National Security Council coordinator, said last week.

China

China has waived the debt of some African countries. But it's not about refinancing - In mid-August, China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs surprised the world with a series of announcements. Wang Yi, Beijing's most senior diplomat, promised extensive debt relief for some of the world's poorest countries. The announcement was made at the ministerial meeting of the Forum for China Africa Cooperation.

In addition to increasing food assistance to the continent, Wang committed to no longer demanding repayment of concessional loans that in the recent past had reached maturity, but which 17 African states had failed to pay off.

Outstanding balances on loans mostly extended by China's Ministry of Commerce (or, less frequently, The Export-Import Bank of China) are thus slated to be cancelled.

Details about beneficiaries and credit lines are still to be released. But from an African standpoint this was welcome – if somewhat expected – news.

Wang's proclamation was timely in light of the growing sense of a looming debt crisis that threatens many developing countries. This includes a number on the African continent. Combined private and public external debt of African states more than quintupled between 2000 and 2020. Chinese public and private lenders accounted for 12% of the continent's US\$696 billion external debts in 2020.

The continent's average debt-to-GDP ratios exceeded 50% prior to the pandemic. The most recent Africa Economic Outlook from the African Development Bank expects Africa's debt-to-GDP ratio to be 70% this year. As of February 2022, 23 African countries were either in debt distress or at risk of it.

The recent economic meltdown and toppling of the Rajapaksa family regime in Sri Lanka rattled countries from Ghana to South Africa. The events stoked fears that panicked markets might question the solvency of African sovereigns next.

Beijing's announcement was largely already priced into the strategy of many African central banks. Chinese interest-free loans are frequently cancelled. And it's widely understood that when China extends such credit lines, they are rarely ever fully paid back.

Sanctions

Exxon Takes Legal Action After Putin Blocks Final Russian Exit - Exxon took the first step toward filing a lawsuit against Russia after Vladimir Putin blocked the oil major from exiting its only remaining operation in the country.

Exxon has been trying to exit the Sakhalin-1 project in the country's Far East since March but was stalled by a presidential decree earlier this month. Russia's state-owned Rosneft PJSC said the dispute could be resolved if Exxon resumes normal operations at the project.

US computer firm Dell ceases Russia operations - Dell Technologies on August 27 said it had ended all operations in Russia after shutting its offices earlier this month, becoming the latest Western company to leave Russia in the face of Moscow's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.