

Conflict Update # 38

April 23rd, 2022

Conflict Assessment

3 More Russian Generals – Reports are coming in of three more Russian generals – 2 killed and 1 severely injured and expected to die – attacked by Ukrainian forces in Eastern Ukraine. They are reported to have been involved in a senior field command meeting along with a group of field officers.

Together with the deaths and serious injuries to other senior Russian staff, the command post was also eliminated.

Russia running scared? It is increasingly apparent that Russia is, as far as possible, avoiding direct contact with Ukrainian forces.

Attacking innocent and undefended farms, towns and civilian groups, as opposed to Ukrainian units and commands, appears to now be the plan of operation. Long-range artillery, rockets and missiles are deployed to engage Ukrainian forces from afar, so as to avoid direct and close contact fighting.

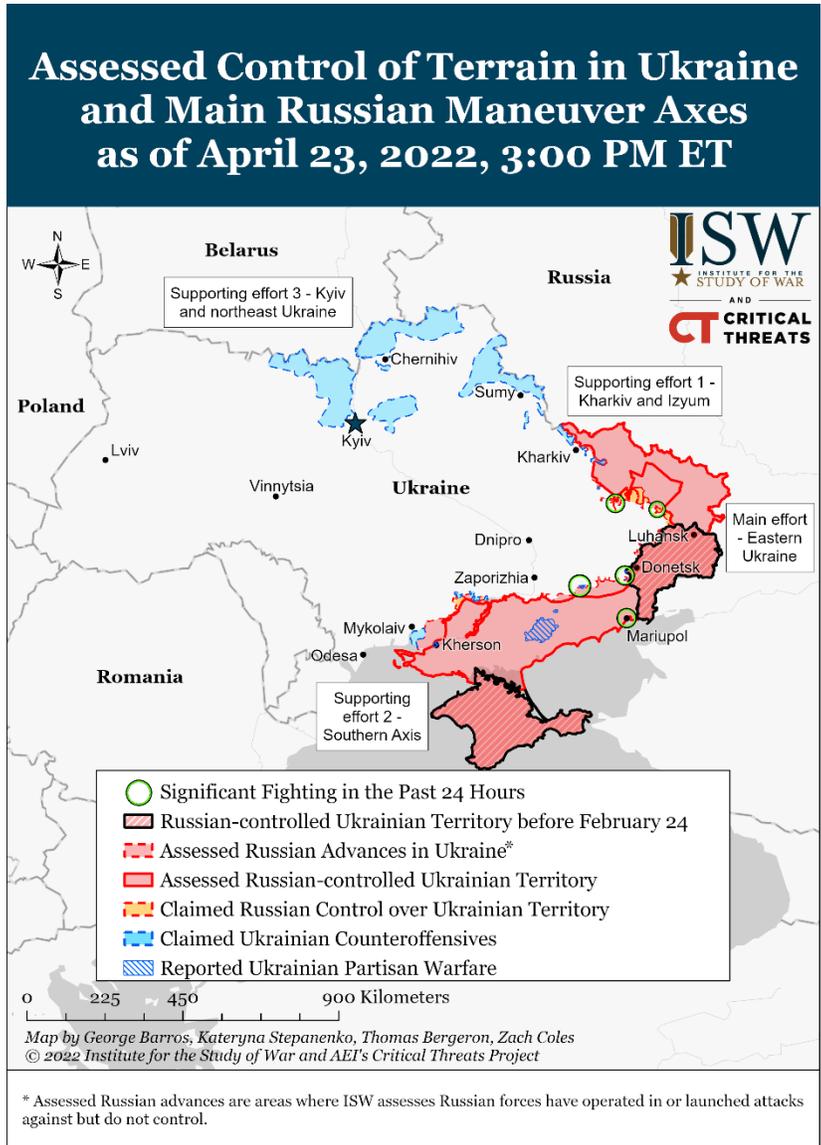
During the first six weeks from the February 24th start of the invasion, ill-equipped and poorly-trained conscripts, woefully inadequate supply chains, ineffective field command, and aging, unmaintained equipment saw defeat on multiple fronts.

With thousands of Russians dying, devastating destruction of tanks and APCs (armored personnel carriers), commanders targeted and killed, and with nowhere to turn to, they are permanently scarred by what they have experienced.

Ukrainian smart weapons strike around the clock without warning and with deadly accuracy, whereas Russian “blind” barrages, without smart guidance systems, blanket towns and regions, with huge collateral damage.

Coverage of Russian troop movements show that conscripts sit atop APCs instead of inside, where it is supposedly safe. This is because Ukrainian anti-armor smart missiles penetrate the APCs, gruesomely killing all inside.

Small wonder that Russian reaction is to avoid close contact, at every level within their ranks.



Ukraine now has more tanks on the ground than Russia, has a 4:1 anti-tank pod versus Russian tank ratio, but is outnumbered 3:1 in troops.

What intimidates Russia though is Ukraine's superior command and control capability, modern smart weaponry, seemingly unstoppable ability to "listen" to all Russian communiques and chatter, their field agility and a network of "informers," relaying messages 24/7 about Russian movements and strengths.

Add to this American-provided satellite intelligence – literally down to individual troop and equipment levels – and a "leaky" Russian communication infrastructure.

Russia continues to lose troops, tanks, valuable aircraft and helicopters. Loss of the Mokba missile cruiser is reported to have had a disastrous effect on morale, as does continuing loss of senior general command staff.

Resulting in withdrawal to the east, re-grouping, reinforcement and a new battle commander appointed. On the open plains of eastern Ukraine, this should in theory give Russian forces the upper hand, but that hasn't been the case. Replenishment troops have not yet recovered from their battle scars, tactics are being repeated, general field staff are still being eliminated and Russian air cover is still not assured.

And now NATO is pouring field artillery and smart weapons into Ukraine, Ukrainian troop numbers are increasing and the annual wet season is hampering Russian armored column progress. Ukraine is gearing for a different battle and tactical defense, as well as moving to offensive engagements.

One cannot discount the possibility of Ukrainian forces striking Russian supply lines – potentially in Russia itself. One should also not discount further Russian open sea warship casualties. British-supplied anti-ship missiles and American-supplied unmanned attack sea craft have yet to be launched by Ukrainian forces.

The Russians have taken more than 40 small towns in their advance from the east, similar to the invasion pattern in the weeks following February 24th. Once Ukrainian intelligence determines Russian tactics, channels and firepower, they will, just as they did north of Kyiv, start targeting them discriminately and effectively. NATO 155mm howitzers will provide long-range Ukrainian defense capability.

Russian mechanical armored advances have not spread out across wide terrains, instead following highways and country lanes - ideal for efficient smart weapon targeting.

Russian troops have every reason to be afraid, they do not want to be in Ukraine, their contracts as conscripts prohibits their being deployed to "hot spots" and they are being exposed to death and maiming on a daily basis.

Russian Progress In Donbass Slowing Due To Ukraine Resistance, Says UK - UK Defence Intelligence has claimed that despite increasing activity in Ukraine, the Russian forces have not made any major gains in the Donbas region.

Russian forces continued offensive operations along multiple axes even as they completed moving reinforcements drawn from the retreat from Kyiv into the east and continued redeploying some forces from Mariupol to the north. The Russians have not taken time to refit troops moving from Kyiv or Mariupol before recommitting them to combat operations. They are not pausing offensive operations to wait until they have concentrated overwhelming combat power, and they do not appear to be massing forces on a few decisive axes of advance. They are continuing the pattern of operations they have followed throughout the war: committing small collections of units to widely dispersed attacks along multiple axes and refusing to accept necessary operational pauses to set conditions for decisive operations.

Subordinate Main Effort—Mariupol - Russian forces continued to attack Ukrainian defenders in the Azovstal Steel Plant and are likely attempting to starve out those remaining within the facility.

Subordinate Main Effort—Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts - Russian forces conducted limited ground offensives in Rubizhne, Popasna, and Marinka on April 23 but did not make any significant territorial gains.

Supporting Effort #1—Kharkiv and Izyum - Russian forces maintained their positions northeast of Kharkiv city and continued to shell surrounding areas on April 23. Reports of reinforcements from the Kyiv axis in Kharkiv Oblast likely indicate that Russia intends to maintain pressure on Kharkiv city, contradicting the Russian claim that Moscow's focus is on securing the borders of Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts. Russian ground lines of communication (GLOCs) do not currently run through or even near Kharkiv city, and the most recent Ukrainian counteroffensives near the city are unlikely to threaten Russian GLOCs from Belgorod to Izyum.

Supporting Effort #2—Southern axis - Russian forces continued a limited offensive in Zaporizhia Oblast but paused ground offensive operations in northern Kherson Oblast on April 23.

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

Six people were killed in Odesa when Russian cruise missiles struck an apartment building, according to Ukrainian officials. A 3-month-old child was among the six killed. The city's mayor criticized Russia for the attack, noting it took place on the eve of Orthodox Easter.

Why Russia keeps losing so many armored vehicles in Ukraine: "It's finders keepers for these farmers" - To date, Ukraine says Russia has lost close to 3,000 armored vehicles — but only half in combat. "It's not good military leadership if you are losing so many men and so much equipment," Ukrainian military expert Yuri Zbanatski told CBS News.

Ukrainian farmers retrieve abandoned and damaged Russian equipment as and when they hear about the pieces. They then tow them away with tractors to yards where they can be stripped or deployed. "They [the tanks] were abandoned or ran out of fuel, and it's finders keepers for these farmers," Zbanatski said. "Their personnel is not properly trained. Their commanding officers are not able to plan their offensive operations properly."

Russia's military is getting defeated by Ukrainian mud - If it wasn't so bloody and violent, it'd be funny. Putin seemed to think he could overcome 300 years of military history in which various conquering armies floundered and drowned in Ukrainian mud during early spring, but it turns out you can't beat nature.

According to a new report in CNBC published this week, Russia failed to take into consideration the time of year when it invaded Ukraine. The army began their invasion in late February, the same time of year known locally as "muddy road season," or "Rasputitsa." It happens twice a year — spring and fall — and it makes unpaved roads impossible because they turn into thick, deep mud even tanks can't plow through.

Ukraine preps for shift in war where modern artillery will dominate - Ukraine is gearing up for a different type of warfare in its eastern regions as Russia looks to completely control the Donbas.

U.S. defense officials have been sounding the alarm for weeks that the terrain will dictate a different type of battlefield in the Luhansk and Donetsk regions and modern artillery will take center stage as Kyiv tries to fend off Russia's attacks.

"All indications are that the battlefield dynamics will soon shift from closer-range combat to longer-range fires where artillery and multiple launch rocket systems are critical," he added.

Despite continued fighting and shelling in areas throughout the Donbas, the U.S. assesses that Russia has not yet launched its offensive campaign there and is instead still conducting "shaping operations."

Nuclear Tactic

Russia to deploy Sarmat missiles by autumn in 'historic' nuclear upgrade - Russia said today it plans to deploy its newly tested Sarmat intercontinental ballistic missiles, capable of mounting nuclear strikes against the United States, by autumn.

The target, stated by Dmitry Rogozin, head of the Roscosmos space agency, is an ambitious one as Russia reported its first test-launch only on Wednesday and Western military experts say more will be needed before the missile can be deployed.

The Sarmat is capable of carrying 10 or more nuclear warheads and decoys, and of striking targets thousands of kilometres away in the US or Europe. Will Russia first “test and prove” these in Ukraine?

Russia Warns of 'Nuclear' or 'Chemical' False Flags in Ukraine – A Russian military official has said the U.S. is preparing "provocations" so it can accuse Moscow of using weapons of mass destruction.

News agency TASS reported that Igor Kirillov said the alleged American plan was in response to the "successes" Russian troops had in the invasion of Ukraine.

"The Russian Ministry of Defense has information about the preparation by the United States of America of provocations to accuse the Russian Armed Forces of using chemical, biological or tactical nuclear weapons," he said.

This is a typical Russian “false Flag” ploy, where they cast suspicion to cover what they themselves are engaged in, so as to project blame or at least create confusion.

Peace Talks

Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy: "I have no trust for Russia" - Ukrainian President Zelenskyy said Saturday he wants to stop the war with Russia, with either the military or diplomacy. But Zelenskyy stated that he doesn't trust Russia, who continually break agreements.

They are not going to stop - A senior Russian military official's comments that Moscow plans to take full control of the eastern Donbas region and southern Ukraine during its new offensive has drawn a sharp reaction from Kyiv as Ukraine's General Staff said Russian forces had increased attacks along the whole front line in the east.

The comments by Minnekayev were the most detailed description yet of Russia's goals in the second phase of its invasion of Ukraine and were highlighted by Kyiv as a sign that the Kremlin has been lying in previous statements that said it had no territorial ambitions.

"They are not going to stop. The command of the Russian central military district announced the next victim of the Russian aggression. After gaining control over the southern Ukraine, Russia plans to invade Moldova, where they say Russian speakers are being 'oppressed,'" Ukraine's Defense Ministry said on Twitter.

Russian negotiator confirms 'several long conversations' took place with Ukrainian side - Russia's chief negotiator Vladimir Medinsky confirmed a TASS news report that “several long conversations” had been held but he gave no details. Earlier this week the Kremlin said Russia had submitted a new written proposal, but Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said he had neither seen nor heard about it. It remains unclear whether the two sides can revive their faltering peace efforts, more than eight weeks after Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine.

Post-Conflict

Putin has ignited a new anti-colonial struggle. This time, Moscow is the target - Maybe the Russian empire, the last and most terrible European empire, will fall. Or maybe it will absorb the hit and survive as it has survived and expanded since the 17th century. You'd be a fool to bet against it. The graveyards of Eurasia are full of those who did.

And yet the breathtaking heroism of the Ukrainian resistance and the insane self-delusion of the Putinist regime are allowing Russia's opponents from Syria to Central Asia, and from Georgia to Moldova, to ask that most revolutionary of questions: "What if?"

We've learned better than to be optimists in the years since the fin de siècle's silly season. We expect brute power to prevail now. The Russian armed forces are undoubtedly corrupt and inept. But you can see the empire winning, as it has always won, by throwing recruits into battle without a thought for their lives and terrorizing civilians. For its part, western intelligence is not predicting a swift Ukrainian victory but a hard, grinding war whose outcome is uncertain.

Questions are now being raised around the world, and particularly in ex-Soviet zones about Russia's imperialist objectives and motives. Historically Moscow has raised these questions regarding the British Empire and later US international engagements.

Russia's struggle to defeat Ukraine 'a warning' for China over risks of going to war - The West's response to the attack and support for Kyiv shows the risks for China if it faces a united front during any conflict. Military analysts say the Russian military's setbacks show China should not take the decision to wage war lightly.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has not only highlighted its tactical errors, but most of all it has taught China about the risks of taking the decision to go to war lightly, diplomatic and military observers have said.

Humanitarian

Satellite images show what appears to be a second mass grave site near Mariupol. The graves sit in a cemetery in the town of Vynohradne, a site that includes several parallel trenches measuring 131 feet each, according to satellite imagery provider Maxar Technologies. The photos follow the discovery of a myriad of freshly dug mass graves in the town of Manhush, just 12 miles west of Mariupol.

Ukraine warns Moscow is running 'parallel' evacuation routes from Mariupol into Russia - Ukraine on Saturday announced there were humanitarian evacuation corridors opened around Mariupol, but warned Moscow was running "parallel" routes headed for Russia.

"Just received information that the occupiers may try to organize their corridor in parallel with us for evacuation to Russia," Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereschuk took to Facebook to warn. "So please be careful. Do not surrender to deception and provocation."

Berlin Institute Taps World War Two Experience to Document Ukraine War Crimes - Berlin's Pilecki Institute, which is dedicated to researching 20th century history including Nazi crimes in World War Two, is tapping that experience to collect testimonies from refugees about possible war crimes in Ukraine.

Impacts

Russian oligarchs dying suspiciously – we mentioned two oligarchs who died under suspicious circumstances last week. Now two further oligarchs have died. Is Putin taking the opportunity to eliminate competing power bases and structures?

Georgians Sell Off Russian Territory To Raise Money For Ukraine - A Tbilisi-based digital creative agency is "selling Russia piece by piece" in the form of non-fungible tokens (NFTs), the unique digital collectibles built on blockchain technology, to help Ukraine "rebuild" from the 8-week-old war. But it's also part of a growing list of globe-spanning digital fund-raisers aimed at helping Ukrainian institutions, military defenders, and civilians in a conflict that has killed thousands, leveled towns, and displaced millions of Ukraine's prewar population of around 34 million people.

Belarusian "Foreign Legions" – Thousands of Belarusians are now fighting in Ukraine in the Belarusian version of the International Brigades of the Spanish civil war. Thousands of Belarusians have volunteered and joined the Kastuś Kalinoŭski Battalion, named after the leader of an uprising against the Russian empire in 1863. The battalion has seen action in the battles around Irpin. One day, its members will return to Belarus with highly portable military skills. They will have questions of their own.

Kyrgyzstan Bans 'Z' Symbol Victory Day Celebrations On May 9 - Kyrgyzstan has banned the "Z" symbol from being used during Victory Day celebrations on May 9. The State Committee for National Security (UKMK) said in a statement late on April 21 that the use of the symbol, which has been used by Russia's armed forces to mark their vehicles and equipment during the unprovoked invasion of Ukraine, will be considered to be "inciting ethnic hatred."

Japan, Russia settle salmon quota amid tensions over Ukraine - The Japanese Fisheries Agency says Japan and Russia have reached an agreement over Tokyo's annual catch quota for Russian-born salmon and trout, despite delays and chilled relations between the two sides amid Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

German Minister Flags Stagflation Risk as Ukraine Strains Build - More serious stability crisis must be prevented, Lindner says, and stresses need to keep pressure on Russia "war chest."

A Moscow broker explains what's happening in Russia's chaotic markets, where vultures are scavenging for profit and the Kremlin is propping up stocks and the ruble.

Almost two months after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, a strange calm appears to have descended on the country's financial markets. Russia's ruble has now fully recovered from its dramatic crash in the days following the attack. The country's stocks remain deep in negative territory for the year, but the dramatic sell-offs seen in late February are a thing of the past.

Yet take a look under the surface, and you'll see the strong arm of the Russian state strenuously holding the markets together. The government has introduced strict capital controls that have boosted the ruble, and it has banned foreign investors from ditching domestic assets.

Moscow's Moex stock index has tumbled roughly 40% so far this year, but it has risen around 9% since bottoming in late February. Lutsko believes its level should be considerably lower. "The Russian equity market doesn't reflect the unfortunate, true reality," he said. "Simply because non-residents are restricted from selling."

In 2021, foreigners owned about 80% of the tradable stocks on the Moscow exchange, worth about \$200 billion. A lack of foreign players in the market has caused liquidity to dry up, making it harder to buy and sell assets. Retail investors — who have "little understanding and idea how to play the market" — now dominate trading, according to the Moscow broker.

Over in the bond market, the situation is even worse. Russia's government and many of its biggest companies are on the verge of default on their foreign debts, after US sanctions stymied their access to the global financial system. Bonds in many big companies, such as Gazprom, have plunged.

But Lutsko said the crash in prices has attracted bargain hunters, hoping to profit from a rebound in prices if the Ukraine picture clears. Although he avoids the term, such investors are typically referred to as "vultures".

Containment

Germany Defense Subsidiary Seeks Govt Permission To Send 100 Marder Vehicles To Ukraine - German Defense subsidiary Rheinmetall on Friday sought for permission to supply 100 Marder-type infantry fighting vehicles to Ukrainian forces to counter Russia's assaults as the war enters the deadlier second phase. The defense firm has applied for the deal approval with the federal government of Germany, the newspaper Welt am Sonntag reported. The request was officially received by German Ministry of Economics and was transferred to the Federal Security Council that includes key decision makers German chancellor Olaf Scholz and the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, the Interior, Defense, Finance, the Economy, Economic Cooperation and Justice. This is the first such application received by the German government since Russia's invasion on February 24 against its neighboring state.

In the application, Rheinmetall Landsysteme urged that it is ready to sell the infantry to the Ukraine forces "as soon as possible." This comes as the Deputy General of the German Bundeswehr Markus Laubenthal rejected proposal to supply Ukraine with heavy weaponry or defense equipment to avoid escalating the armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine, unlike the rest of the Europe. The firm states that the first batch of the infantry vehicles can be received by Ukraine in a matter of just a few weeks.



Marder-type
Inspector

UK to send more military equipment, Johnson tells Zelensky - The UK is to provide Ukraine with more military equipment, the prime minister has confirmed in a phone conversation with President Zelensky. Johnson told Zelensky more armored vehicles, drones and anti-tank weapons will be sent to Ukraine, a Downing Street spokesman said.

Man-held weaponry supplied to date;

Javelin

Portable anti-tank missile launcher



NLAW

Next generation light anti-tank weapon



STARStreak

Lightweight air defence system



Zelensky thanked the PM for the training of more than 20 Ukrainian troops who arrived in the UK last week. The Ukrainian soldiers receiving training in the UK are being instructed on how to use 120 armored vehicles that will be supplied to the resistance effort against Moscow, the government has said.

The prime minister told Mr Zelensky Russia would be held to account for its actions and that the UK government was helping to collect evidence of war crimes. He also updated the president on new UK sanctions against members of the Russian military, Downing Street said.

Russia Investigates Media Report on Presence of British SAS Special Forces in Ukraine - Russia's top state investigative body said on Saturday it was looking into a Russian media report alleging that sabotage experts from Britain's SAS special forces have been deployed to western Ukraine.

The Special Air Service is an elite military force trained to conduct special operations, surveillance and counter-terrorism. Russia's RIA Novosti news agency on Saturday quoted a Russian security source as saying about 20 SAS members had been sent to the Lviv region.

The British Ministry of Defense had no immediate comment on the Russian investigation in response to a Reuters request. Britain said it sent military trainers to Ukraine earlier this year to instruct local forces in using anti-tank weapons, but the British government said on Feb. 17 - a week before Russia's invasion - that it had pulled out all troops except those needed to protect its ambassador.

If true, this has huge and strategic implications for the war, should Russia deem the actions to be NATO-inspired and choose to retaliate.

2 U.S. Cabinet officials will meet with Zelenskyy in Kyiv - Zelenskyy mentioned the plans to meet with Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin during a press conference. A State Department spokesperson declined to comment to NPR.

The visit would mark the first time top U.S. officials traveled to Ukraine since the Russian invasion. The meeting comes as Zelenskyy continues to push Western allies for more weapons.

Ukraine will ask US for more heavy weapons to defeat Russia, Zelenskyy says - Ukraine will ask the US for more heavy weapons to defeat Russia, Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on Saturday, before what he said was a "very significant" visit to Kyiv by the US secretary of state and defense secretary on Sunday.

The Ukrainian president said the US and UK had provided his embattled country with the "best military support" since Vladimir Putin's invasion two months ago. He said he would present an "armaments list" to the Biden administration on Sunday, in order to thwart Russia's ongoing attempt to seize the Donbas region.

With sufficient arms Ukraine's military could take back "tomorrow" territory temporarily occupied by Russian forces in the south and east, Zelenskyy said. He acknowledged his "western partners" had recently speeded up delivery of arms, especially Washington.

Turkey closes airspace to Russian planes flying to Syria - Turkey has closed its airspace to Russian civilian and military planes flying to Syria, Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu has been quoted as saying by local media.

"We closed the airspace to Russia's military planes – and even civilian ones – flying to Syria. They had until April, and we asked in March," Turkish media quoted Cavusoglu as saying on Saturday.

Supermarkets across UK limit cooking oil purchases as Russian invasion causes supply-chain problems - Most of the UK's sunflower oil comes from Ukraine, which has resulted in restrictions applying to that product as well as olive and rapeseed oils at some supermarkets.

Sanctions

Putin's Next Problem: Russia Is Getting Hit With Tougher Sanctions - In response to the continued Russian aggression in Ukraine, the U.S. imposed new sanctions on Russian financial entities and individuals who are trying to help Moscow evade the unprecedented sanctions already imposed on Russia. In addition, in the latest package of sanctions, the U.S. is prohibiting Russian merchant vessels from making port in the U.S.

Tesco said it is allowing three items per customer, while Waitrose and Morrisons have placed limits of just two items each. Morrisons confirmed to Sky News that it has "introduced a max cap of two bottles per customer on sunflower oil".

EU to Pursue Trade Deal With India to Reduce Its Ties to Russia - The European Union plans to relaunch trade talks with India in an attempt to give the South Asian nation a viable alternative to diversify away from Russia, according to a senior official familiar with the plans. In addition to trade, the EU will pursue a technology council with India that could include discussions on the general data protection regulation, social media and broader digitalization.

Widening of conflict and war

Russian Politician Labels UK As Putin's Next 'Prime Target' - A Russian politician has claimed the UK is Vladimir Putin's next 'prime target'.

Putin's 'special military operation' in Ukraine has stretched into its eighth week, with Russian forces gearing up for an offensive in the 'battle for Donbas'. However, shelling continues to rock cities across the country.

Volodymyr Zelenskyy warned in his latest address that Moscow may launch a more extensive operation across Europe off the back of Ukraine, a claim seemingly backed by a Russian lawmaker on state TV.

Appearing on Russia-1, a channel controlled by the Kremlin, one politician said that Russia 'can carry out a nuclear strike against Great Britain' with relative ease.