

# Conflict Update Day 377

March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023

Back issues at [www.accgroupco.com](http://www.accgroupco.com)

## Conflict Assessment

**Russian losses** – 154,830 (+1,060) soldiers killed, 3,432 (+9) enemy tanks, 6,714 (+11) armored combat vehicles, 2,456 (+23) artillery systems, 488 (0) MLRS systems, 253 (+3) air defense systems, 303 (+1) warplanes, 289 (+0) helicopters, 2,095 (+9) UAVs of the operational-tactical level, 873 (+0) cruise missiles, 18 (+0) warships/cutters, 5,323 (+16) trucks and tankers, 4 Iskander Missile Launchers (+0), 239 fuel bowsers (+0) and 236 (+2) units of equipment.

## Key Takeaways

**Ukrainian paratroopers destroyed dozens of Wagner’s assault groups in one night** - “Our defense forces managed to push the enemy back from the southern outskirts. In one night, they destroyed 15 groups of Wagnerites who were trying to storm positions,” Kirienko, a Kievan commander advised.

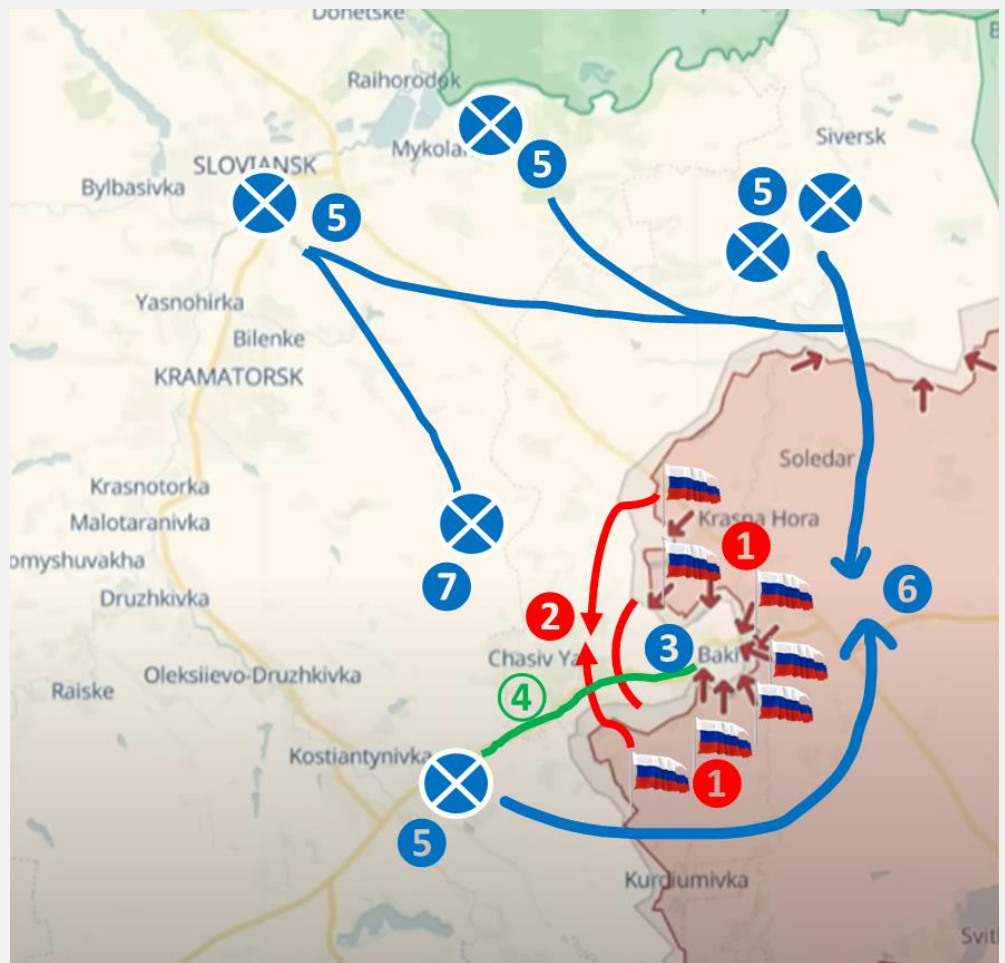
I watched these events unfold last night on a blog channel.

Referring to the map alongside, Russian forces ① were strongly grouped and positioned to the north and south of Ukrainian forces ③ in Bakhmut, fully expecting to encircle the city and announcing that Kyiv should withdraw its troops.

Wagner forces planned to advance in a pincer movement ② to trap the Ukrainians in the city.

The sole evacuation route open to defending troops was along the road ④ leading west to Kostianynivka ⑤, where a Ukrainian BTG was positioned.

As mentioned in yesterday’s Update, Kyiv advanced further elite battalions to the area, and last night they themselves enacted a (wider) pincer movement ⑥ to encircle attacking Russian forces. They then also encamped a BTG from Sloviansk to the west of the city ⑦.



Ukrainian BTGs from Sloviansk, Kostianynivka, Mykolaivka and Siversk advanced in this pincer movement from the northwest and southwest.

Wagner leader Prigozhin has for the past few days been appealing in vain to the Kremlin for ammunition supplies.

Stocks have dried up because of Ukrainian assaults against Russian arms and ammunition depots all around Donetsk and Luhansk - as well as in Mariupol further south – strikes we have reported on over the last two weeks.

Battle reports coming in indicate there are hundreds of Russian casualties but as yet are unconfirmed. We will continue to update on developments along this front line. There are other continuing reports saying Russia is in danger of encircling Bakhmut but appear to be of earlier origin.

Prigozhin did issue a statement two days ago that, should Bakhmut not fall under Moscow control, the entire Russian northeastern front is open to a military collapse.

We will wait and see.

In the last two weeks of March, weather in the region is expected to warm and the ground begin to firm, enabling armored equipment movement. It is also being reported that western heavy armor is beginning to arrive in the region, but we will need to continue to monitor developments over the next month or so.

In the intervening winter period, Ukraine has systematically struck and destroyed multiple Russian storage locations across both the Luhansk and Donetsk Oblasts, together with across Kherson Oblast, Crimea and in the port transition city of Mariupol.

This is the primary reason ammunition is not reaching Russian front line positions, with reports of troops running out of ammo and being instructed to use shovels in hand-to-hand combat with Ukrainian units.

It is widely reported Bakhmut is a more symbolic than strategic symbol, more so for the Kremlin than Kyiv, but the latter is doing what it can to prevent Moscow trumpeting any victory, irrespective of purely symbolic value.

If one looks further north to Kreminna, and beyond that to Svatove, one can see how close Ukrainian forces are to these two strategic Russian-held zones. Strategic because, as mentioned in multiple Updates previously, they straddle the primary Russian rail supply line running from the north to all Kremlin forces in Ukrainian occupied territories.

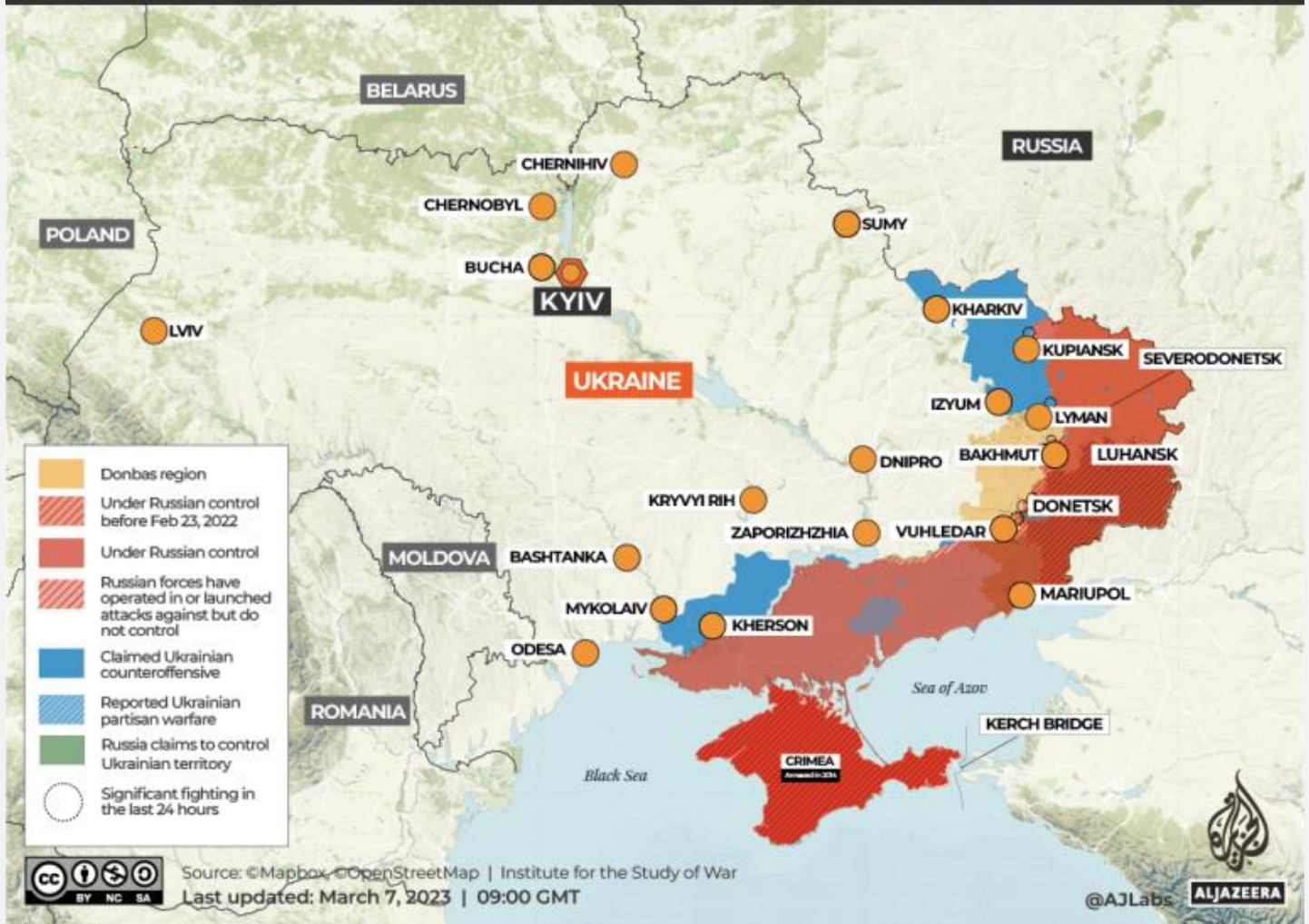
Capture these, and Russia forces all along the extended front line will need to be supplied by road, extremely perilous and far longer in transit with limited flexibility of supply.

That then forces Kremlin supplies, aside from the road option mentioned above, through Crimea and Mariupol. Very tricky indeed. Ukraine attacking the Kerch Bridge between Crimea and Russia again, opens up the peninsula to attack.

That in turn brings the Russian Black Sea fleet out from hiding behind Crimea in order to protect Sevastopol – exposing them to even more advanced anti-ship missile platforms.

**Up to 30,000 Russian casualties in Bakhmut: Western officials** - Up to 30,000 Russian soldiers have been killed or injured in Bakhmut over the last several months amid intense fighting in the eastern Ukrainian city, Western officials said in a briefing Tuesday.

The ratio of dead to injured was "unclear," said the officials, who described Ukraine's refusal to withdraw from the city -- even though its forces are surrounded on three sides -- as "a sound tactic" given that "lots of Russians are being killed." "What we're seeing is a horrific level of Russian casualties for minimal gains," they said, noting that an estimated 200,000 Russian soldiers have been killed or wounded overall since the war began.



**Winged JDAM smart bombs are now operational in Ukraine** - The Ukrainian Air Force can now employ Joint Direct Attack Munition-Extended Range precision-guided bombs, or JDAM-ERs, against Russian forces, says the USAF top officer in Europe. Ukraine's stockpile of these bombs, which can hit targets up to 45 miles away thanks to their pop-out wing kits, is currently relatively small. However, they could already present real problems for Russia's military as The War Zone has previously explored in detail.

"Recently, we've just gotten some precision munitions [to Ukraine] that had some extended range and go a little bit further than the gravity drop bomb and has precision [guidance]," Hecker said. "That's a recent capability that we were able to give them probably in the last three weeks."

Gen. Hecker further confirmed to The War Zone that he was specifically speaking about the JDAM-ER. His comment about these weapons arriving in Ukraine around three weeks ago also aligns almost perfectly with Bloomberg's initial report that the U.S. military was working to deliver them, which was published on February 21.

Standard JDAM kits are designed to be mated to various

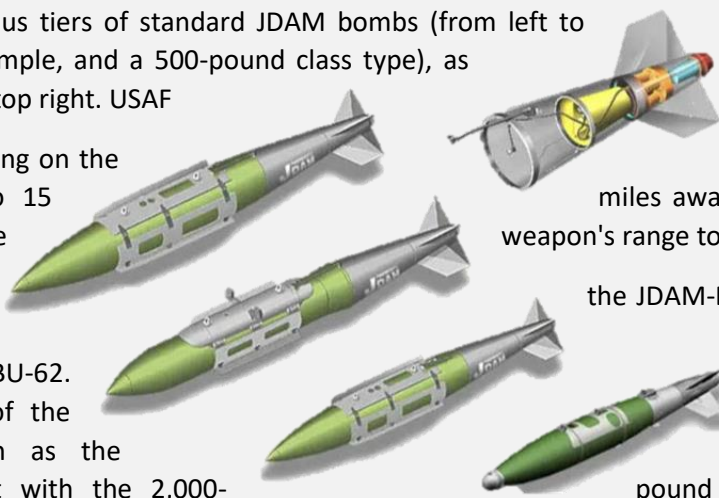


types of Mk 80-series dumb bombs, and other munitions designed around that same form factor, transforming them into precision-guided weapons. The complete JDAM kit consists of a new tail, which contains a GPS-assisted inertial navigation system (INS) guidance system, and strakes that go elsewhere along the bomb body giving it a limited ability to glide to its designated target.

A graphic showing the various tiers of standard JDAM bombs (from left to variants, a 1,000-pound example, and a 500-pound class type), as the tail guidance sections at top right. USAF

A typical JDAM can, depending on the released, hit targets up to 15 the wing kit extends the

The exact configuration of so far is unclear. Gen. using the designation GBU-62. previously known variant of the GBU-62(V)1/B, also known as the combines the JDAM-ER kit with the 2,000-pound mine. You can read more about that particular pairing here.



right, two 2,000-pound-class well as a close-up of one of

altitude at which it is miles away. The JDAM-ER's addition of weapon's range to some 45 miles.

the JDAM-ERs that Ukraine has received Hecker also referred to them However, the only GBU-62 appears to be the Quickstrike-ER, which pound class Mk 64 Quickstrike naval

Even a small number of JDAM-ERs will present new challenges for Russian forces. As The War Zone has noted in the past, a standard JDAM provides a precision-guided fire-and-forget weapon that an aircraft can launch at fixed targets in any weather and then immediately turn away to put distance between it and enemy defenses. The INS portion of the guidance package means that the bomb should retain a significant degree of accuracy even if the GPS signal is jammed or otherwise lost. The JDAM-ER's wing kit then expands the reach of the weapon and helps further improve survivability.

**Russia's elite tank unit was meant to get its most advanced armor. Instead, it's fighting with obsolete Soviet tanks from the '60s, UK intel says** - Russia's military is fighting with 60-year-old T-62 tanks, having been forced to bring the retired vehicles out of storage to the front lines in Ukraine in response to heavy armored-vehicle losses, the UK's Defense Ministry said Monday.

The ministry said in an intelligence update that even the 1st Guards Tank Army, which has long been considered an elite Russian unit, was being reequipped with dated Soviet-era T-62s.

The 1st Guards Tank Army was due to receive next-generation T-14 Armata main battle tanks — Russia's newest and most powerful — starting in 2021, the intelligence update said. The T-14 is a high-tech vehicle said to have defense systems capable of shooting down anti-tank rockets, as well as sophisticated sensors, onboard drones, and a high level of automation.

Instead, it's receiving T-62 tanks, which were first adopted by the Soviet Union in 1961 and ceased production in the '70s, according to the UK's Defense Ministry.

The invading country's tank force, once seen as formidable, is being torn apart by the Ukrainian military. US officials have said on more than one occasion that Russia has likely lost as many as half its main battle tanks while fighting in Ukraine, if not more.

Russian tanks have fallen prey to Ukrainian soldiers' use of anti-tank Javelin missiles, with military experts telling Insider that Russia is experiencing heavy losses because it doesn't know how to use its tanks properly.

**Kyiv identifies man 'executed' on video** - Ukrainian military has named the soldier allegedly shot by Russian forces as prisoner of war Tymofiy Shadura, who went missing in early February.

Kyiv has opened a criminal investigation into Russia's "brutal and brazen shooting of an unarmed person" after a video of the shooting spread on social media.

**Russia's Shoigu says capture of Ukraine's Bakhmut will allow more offensives** - Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu said seizure of Bakhmut in eastern Ukraine was critical to punching a hole in Ukrainian defences and would allow Moscow's forces to mount further offensive operations deeper inside the country.

## Containment

**NATO taking part in 'air policing' missions on Russia's doorstep** - NATO is set to take part in "air policing missions" on Russia's doorstep, according to a key British security official.

British Defense Secretary Ben Wallace confirmed the UK is set to lead the operation, alongside Germany, over the Baltic nation of Estonia, which shares its eastern border with Russia, in an interview with Sky News. He said the mission will help ensure "the security of Europe's skies" and bolster "NATO's presence in eastern Europe" at a critical point in relations with Eastern Europe.

The mission comes as tensions between NATO and Russia remain high amid Putin's invasion of Ukraine, which drew sharp condemnation from NATO member states. Russian authorities for years have expressed concerns about the eastern expansion of NATO, including the possibility of Ukraine joining the organization.

**U.S. to train NATO nations on operating HIMARS across Europe** - The US Army is preparing to offer training on the HIMARS that have featured prominently in the Ukraine war.

The V Corps of the U.S. Army will lead a summit and training sessions to "increase knowledge on the operations and sustainment of HIMARS and associated systems," the corps said in a statement. The training will likely take place in eastern and central Europe, the Army said.

The European High Mobility Artillery Rocket System Initiative, as it is known, will include instructions on "how to effectively man, train, sustain and fight with the weapon system." It will also involve foreign soldiers embedding with U.S. units for training, according to the V Corps statement.



**Poland to send 10 Leopard 2 tanks to Ukraine** - A further 10 Leopard 2 tanks from Poland will be sent to Ukraine this week, the Polish defence minister said.

"Four [tanks] are already in Ukraine, another 10 will go to Ukraine this week," Mariusz Blaszczak told a news conference. Poland had promised to send 14 Leopard 2 tanks in total.

**Romania aims to buy Abrams tanks** - Romania aims to buy Abrams tanks made by General Dynamics, a defence minister official in charge of military public procurement was quoted as saying earlier this morning.

The European Union and NATO state has raised defence spending to 2.5% of gross domestic product this year from 2%, in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The country, which shares a 650-km (400 mile) border with Ukraine, is host to a U.S. ballistic missile defense system and, as of last year, has a permanent alliance battlegroup stationed on its territory.

"We are in the process of sending our (ministry) request for preliminary approval to acquire a batallion of Abrams tanks," lieutenant general Teodor Incicas was quoted saying by defence ministry publication Observatorul Militar. Incicas heads the army's general weapons division.

**Elbit wins artillery weapons orders from mystery buyer in Europe** - Israeli defense company Elbit Systems said it won several deals in Europe this month, including a \$119 million sale of ATMOS truck-mounted howitzers and a \$133 million contract for PULS artillery rocket systems.

The deals, which Elbit said are with a European NATO member country, come as several governments on the continent continue their shopping sprees to resupply their troops, having sent munitions from their own stocks to Ukraine, which is under invasion by Russia.

"We are witnessing a trajectory of increased demand for advanced artillery solutions from militaries around the world, including European countries and NATO members, as part of their efforts to increase effectiveness of their armed forces. Our operationally proven systems provide an advanced, cost-effective solution to meet that demand," said Bezahel Machlis, CEO of Elbit.

Elbit says the ATMOS can fire "all NATO-certified 155mm projectiles" and that its range can exceed 40 kilometers (25 miles) with certain ammunition. "It is designed for rapid deployment and operation enabling provision of fire support for a broad range of missions," it added.

The PULS can fire both free-flying and precision-guided rockets as well as missiles at ranges of up to 300 kilometers.

**Massive ammunition orders placed for Ukraine** - A "massive order" of ammunition, ranging from small arms to 155mm artillery rounds, is being prepared in Brussels but only EU and Norwegian manufacturers will be able to take advantage. The UK is poised to miss out on this order.

## Sanctions

**Kremlin says it does not recognise the Western oil price cap** - The Kremlin said it did not recognise the price cap introduced by Western countries on its oil exports after the US said that the cap was "working well".

"We do not and will not recognise any cap. We are working so that this system does not harm our own interests," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

Russia's economy has proved resilient despite tough Western sanctions, but the price cap has complicated its efforts to sell oil globally.

Last month, Moscow said it would cut output by 500,000 barrels per day in March in response to the price cap.

## Comments, Updates, Developments and Reports

**China and US headed towards conflict, China's foreign minister says** - The US and China are heading towards inevitable conflict if Washington does not change its approach, China's new foreign minister has said in a fiery press conference in which he defended his country's strengthening relationship with Russia.

In his first media appearance as foreign minister, held earlier today on the sidelines of the “two sessions” political gathering, Qin Gang outlined China’s foreign policy agenda for the coming years, presenting China and its relationship with Russia as a beacon of strength and stability, and the US and its allies as a source of tension and conflict.

**What did Qin say about Russia?** “With China and Russia working together, the world will have a driving force,” he said. “The more unstable the world becomes the more imperative it is for China and Russia to steadily advance their relations.”

**Ukrainian victims of war with Russia deserve justice, Garland says** – USAG Garland, who traveled to Ukraine for a conference focused on justice and human rights, said he is supporting an effort to hold Russia accountable for war crimes. While in Lviv, Ukraine, he met with President Zelenskyy and signed an agreement to promote information sharing about Russian atrocities that have targeted maternity hospitals, schools, and other civilian dwellings since the start of the unprovoked conflict one year ago.

“It’s very important that people whose loved ones are killed or disappeared have some way of finding out what happened to them,” he told NPR.

## Putin & Russia

**Putin hoped to break NATO after Ukraine invasion** - Putin hoped that the invasion of Ukraine in February of last year would bring NATO to heel and result in a no-fly zone declared over Poland and the Baltic states, leaked documents from the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) show.

The leaked documents come from a source known as Wind of Change and were reportedly sent to Russian human rights activist Vladimir Osechkin, The Sun reported.

Putin imagined that after the invasion of Ukraine, an ultimatum would be issued to the West to accept Russia’s occupation of the country and that a no-fly zone would be declared over Poland and the Baltic states.

After that, Russia’s “nuclear triad” of land, air and submarine “would be activated,” leading to the “withdrawal of several countries from NATO” and possibly the EU, the source said. It added that many Western countries would be so terrified that they would even accept rocket attacks on Poland or the Baltic countries.

All of this would cause a “fundamental collapse of the West within the time allotted (by Putin) after the ultimatum was issued.” Putin expected Western countries to issue “separate appeals to Russia that they are not conducting aggressive actions against Russia and are not part of the possible war.”

At the end of the day, Russia would regain power comparable to the former Soviet Union, which would allow Russia to take political control of a number of countries that were part of the USSR, whereas NATO as an integral structure would cease to exist.

“It’s pretty plausible” Putin had such plans before he started the war in Ukraine, Keir Giles, a Russia expert at the foreign policy think-tank Chatham House, quoted by The Sun, has said.

“One of the reasons why Putin’s invasion of Ukraine took so many in the West by surprise was because it made no sense – unless you were within Putin’s mind,” he added.

**Comment** – The more disturbing element here is – did Putin share this with President Xi of China in their pre-Olympics tête-à-tête, and if he did, was or is this the way in which they intend to conduct themselves in Realpolitik?

Because if so, then the days of generally-accepted Grand Strategies and behind the scene diplomacy are obviously in danger of being spent.

Russia has historically been very adept at international power plays and Realpolitik, in fact one of the better players.

So this conspicuously naïve appreciation and estimation of international reactive outrage to its illegal invasion of a smaller neighboring country, and an extended belief that the world would roll over and accept it, is startling in its brazenness.

The question must then be – Is this the manner in which Russia (and China) believe they can achieve a new bi-polar global world order?

Because if so, we are in for a rough geopolitical ride ahead of us.

**ISW Reports the Kremlin is returning to its previously unsuccessful volunteer recruitment** and crypto-mobilization campaigns to avoid calling the second mobilization wave. The return of the voluntary recruitment and crypto-mobilization campaigns likely indicates that the Kremlin will not launch another mobilization wave at least before the summer 2023 due to spring conscription cycle on April 1.

**Infighting among Putin allies reaches fever pitch** - Wagner Group financier, Yevgeny Prigozhin, has hit back at criticism from Russian military blogger Igor Girkin amid their deepening spat over how Moscow's forces are fighting in Ukraine.

The pair are high-profile Russian voices on Putin's invasion and are in an increasingly bitter public dispute over how the war is being fought.

Girkin is a former FSB officer, and ex-commander who led Russian-backed forces in the separatist Donetsk region in 2014. Also known as Igor Strelkov, he wrote on Sunday that Prigozhin's presence as head of the mercenary group was harming Moscow's campaign to take Bakhmut.

**How Russian journalists in exile are covering the war in Ukraine** - On December 1st, TV Rain, an independent Russian television station that had been banned from Russian cable and satellite channels, was in its fifth month of broadcasting from Riga, the capital of Latvia.

Most of its journalists had fled Moscow during the first week of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, dispersing to Georgia, Armenia, Turkey, Israel, and elsewhere, only to discover in exile that, to much of the world they represented a country waging genocidal war.

Banks wouldn't accept them as clients, landlords wouldn't rent to them, and residents in Tbilisi and other cities painted "Russians go home" on street corners. Early on, two Baltic states were exceptions: Lithuania, which had long served as a base for Russia's political opposition, and Latvia. Last March, the country's foreign minister, Edgars Rinkēvičs, tweeted, "As #Russia closes independent media and introduces complete censorship, I reiterate Latvia's readiness to host persecuted Russian journalists and help them in any way we can."

TV Rain now had three studios—in Riga, Amsterdam, and Tbilisi—and a Latvian license, which allowed it to broadcast on cable channels in the EU. Alexey Korostelev, who was hosting that afternoon's episode of the newscast "Here and Now," was working out of the Tbilisi studio, a generic space in an office tower on the outskirts of the city. Korostelev, who was twenty-seven, came from a small town near Moscow, and got his first job at TV Rain by winning an on-air contest in college.

Like other journalists in exile, he had had to reinvent reporting, under near-impossible conditions: his job was to cover the Russian-Ukrainian war, but he couldn't return to Russia or enter Ukraine, which has severely restricted access for Russian citizens. Korostelev, who was accustomed to working with a crew on his video stories, had learned to cobble together recorded phone calls and a lot of narrative voice-over. "More like a print story," he told me.



He introduced a report about Sergey Safonov, the commanding officer of Russia's 27th Motorized Rifle Brigade, who is suspected of stabbing an elderly Ukrainian woman to death near the town of Izyum. Sonya Groysman, a twenty-eight-year-old TV Rain correspondent based in Riga, had been able to interview Safonov's bodyguard, a sergeant named Vyacheslav Doronichev. Speaking into the camera of a shaky cell phone, Doronichev said that his boss and other senior officers had spent months "drinking vodka, and terrorizing local residents." He added, "They would cut off people's ears and fingers." Under any circumstances, an active-duty officer of the Russian Army testifying, on camera, to apparent war crimes would have been a major scoop; as a piece reported from exile, it was a striking achievement.

When the newscast cut back to Korostelev, an editor in the studio, whom Korostelev could hear in his earpiece, told him that the next segment was delayed. He had to fill more than a minute of airtime. Korostelev, wearing a yellow sweatshirt with a mike clipped to its collar, began plugging a tip line, which TV Rain had started for collecting first-hand accounts of the war; Groysman's report had originated with a message sent to it. "If you have any tips or witness accounts to share about the draft and the conscripts' experience in the armed forces and at the front line, and if you'd like to discuss the problems in the Russian military, then contact us," he said. "We hope that we've been able to help many servicemen with their gear, for example, and basic necessities at the front, because the accounts that we have published and that have been shared by their relatives are frankly horrifying."

Even as he heard the words coming out of his mouth, Korostelev wondered what had come over him. Help servicemen with their gear? Many of the people who had contacted the tip line were family members who said that their loved ones had been sent to Ukraine with little or no training, and without essential supplies such as thermal underwear, warm socks, or body armor.

Korostelev had discovered that bringing attention to these reports often resulted in the men being withdrawn from frontline positions. He thought of this as one of his contributions to the antiwar effort: he was helping reduce the number of Russian fighters in Ukraine, one conscripted man at a time. He did not mean that TV Rain's work had helped provide "basic necessities at the front." But, somehow, he had said it.

In the first months of the war, Latvia issued about two hundred and sixty visas to media workers fleeing Russia, and nearly as many to their family members. Riga was already home to Meduza, arguably the most respected Russian-language news outlet. (**Comment** – We use this outlet as a source).

Now two dozen others came, including TV Rain, the Russian services of the BBC and Deutsche Welle, the Moscow bureau of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, several smaller publications, and about half the staff of Novaya Gazeta, whose editor-in-chief, Dmitry Muratov, had received the Nobel Peace Prize, in 2021. (**Comment** – And this site as well).

The population of Riga is roughly six hundred thousand people, and that of all Latvia is fewer than two million, so five hundred newcomers is "a noticeable presence," Viktors Makarovs, a senior foreign-ministry official, told me.

Latvia, like Lithuania and Estonia, was occupied by the Soviet Union for nearly fifty years. (All three countries joined the EU in 2004.) About a quarter of the population are Russian-speaking ethnic Russians who settled there during the occupation and their descendants. Latvian authorities have long worried about the group's susceptibility to Russian propaganda. A former President of Estonia, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, whose wife, Ieva, serves as the digital-media adviser to the President of Latvia, has been an outspoken proponent of sealing borders against all Russians, citing, among other things, "a deep skepticism about transforming Russians who come here into non-imperialist democrats."

**Comment** – In erstwhile South Africa, similar demographic tactics were used by the ruling National Party in trying to dilute what they believed was an English-heavy population in the province of Natal – "*The Last Outpost of the British Empire*," as they used to say.

Young Afrikaans men and women joining government departments from elsewhere in the country, were subject to being transferred to the province, whilst English-speaking government employees from Natal were transferred out to Afrikaans-speaking areas.

A big problem manifested though – There is a reason why it is called the “mother tongue.” Because children overwhelmingly grow up speaking their mother’s language. So young Afrikaans men transferred to the province and marrying English girls landed up with their kids speaking English, as they themselves too became “Anglicized” as they continued in their new province of residence and marriage.

A French-Dutch name such Labuschagne (Lub–u-skach–knee) was suddenly (Lab-u-shane), Botha (Boat–uh) was suddenly (Both-a) and so on. It didn’t work and today there are thousands of English-speaking families in the province and in other areas as they migrated away from Natal, who have Afrikaans originating surnames and cultures but live an English-style living, speaking English.

Strange things are mothers.

TV Rain, which is known as Dozhd in Russian, began broadcasting on Latvian cable last July—and almost immediately started racking up warnings and violations. Latvian authorities cited the station for failing to provide an audio track in Latvian, as required by law; for displaying a map of Russia that included the illegally annexed Crimean peninsula; and for its journalists’ repeated use of the phrase “our military” to refer to the Russian armed forces. Editors at TV Rain told me that an illustrator had turned in the map so late that no one had had a chance to check it, but that the use of “our military” was no mistake: it was an acknowledgment of responsibility. To some Latvians, however, it sounded like a statement of allegiance.

By the time of Korostelev’s broadcast, on Thursday, December 1st, TV Rain was facing thousands of euros in fines. The following day, a clip of his slipup spread on social media. It seemed like proof of something many in Latvia had suspected all along—even Russians who claimed to oppose the Kremlin were secretly supporting its war in Ukraine. “So it turns out this was all part of the ‘special operation,’ ” one typical tweet read. “This was a wolf in sheep’s clothing.”

Ekaterina Kotrikadze, TV Rain’s news director, opened that afternoon’s broadcast of “Here and Now” with a clarification and an apology. “The phrase used by Korostelev was factually wrong and absolutely unacceptable to the entire editorial team of TV Rain,” she said. “We oppose Russia’s war in Ukraine. We consider this war to be criminal and vile, and we consider the draft criminal and senseless. Our goal is to get this message across to every single one of our viewers, to as many people as possible. We cannot allow wording that may cast doubt on our position, and for this reason”—Kotrikadze swallowed—“we have decided to stop working with Alexey Korostelev, starting today.” Her speech slowed and she appeared about to cry. “To all those people who have had to flee their homes, to all who have experienced Russian aggression firsthand,” she said, “we ask for your forgiveness.”

TV Rain had a presence in Amsterdam because of one person: the Dutch media entrepreneur Derk Sauer, who moved from the Netherlands to the U.S.S.R. in 1989 to launch Moscow, an English-language glossy magazine about the Soviet capital that was modelled on New York. Sauer was a former radical student activist, a self-described Maoist turned war correspondent.

Moscow folded after two years, but his next venture, an English-language newspaper called the Moscow Times, (**Comment** – And another of our sources) became one of the city’s most popular and reliable publications. In 2005, Sauer sold his company, whose holdings then included the Russian editions of Cosmopolitan and Playboy, for a hundred and eighty million dollars. Still, he stayed in the country. A few years ago, at the age of sixty-four, he bought back the Moscow Times and turned it into a digital nonprofit.

A Russian-language edition appeared in January of 2022, a month before the paper's staff had to flee Russia. Sauer moved back to Amsterdam, where he hadn't lived in thirty-three years.

Before leaving Moscow, Sauer persuaded the Dutch Embassy to issue visas to Russian journalists. About half of the Moscow Times' twenty-five-person staff joined him in Amsterdam (the rest relocated to Armenia). The paper was cut off from the funding sources that it had relied on in Russia—advertising, subscriptions, events, and private donations—so Sauer proposed building a support network of independent Russian media, beginning with the Moscow Times, TV Rain, and Meduza. “Fund-raising is much easier if you come together,” he told me. The group has been able to secure significant funding from what Sauer called “international foundations.”

When the war began, Meduza had to get its journalists out of Russia. Twenty-seven people, several dogs and cats, one parrot, and one pet rabbit went to Latvia—their Riga-based colleagues picked them up at the border. Twelve more people dispersed to other countries. But Meduza has still found a way to report from Russia, using what Timchenko has termed “proxy reporting.” Meduza assigns discreet information-gathering tasks to four or five different people on the ground; writers and editors in Riga then put the story together. “All our sources are now anonymous,” Timchenko told me, “and all our journalists are now anonymous.”

Meduza's readers in Russia have to use virtual private networks, or V.P.N.s, to circumvent the Kremlin's censorship. They read the publication for reporting on the war in Ukraine but also for practical information. After the draft began, in the fall, Meduza published a series of informational posts, with titles such as “How Not to End Up in the War” and “What Happens If You Fail to Report to the Recruiting Office.” “We came up with this tagline, that accurate information saves lives, but now it really does,” Timchenko told me. “We know there are millions of people in Russia who don't like what's going on. They are real people, and they are in pain, and we need to help them know what's going on.”

**Comment** - TV Rain is now based in Amsterdam having been exiled by the Latvian government who revoked their broadcasting license and work permits, suspecting them of being “too Russian.” Given Latvia's close proximity to Russia and having been brutally ruled by Moscow for so long pre-Perestroika and Glasnost, their antipathy to anything Russian or suspected of having Russian ties is fully understandable.

**Tracking Russia's deportation of Ukrainian children — and the case for genocide** - Russians have been practicing the illegal transfer and deportation of Ukrainian children since 2014. Experts consider it one of the five main signs of genocide, and Ukraine's Office of the Prosecutor General has been working to prove this component of the “crime of crimes.”

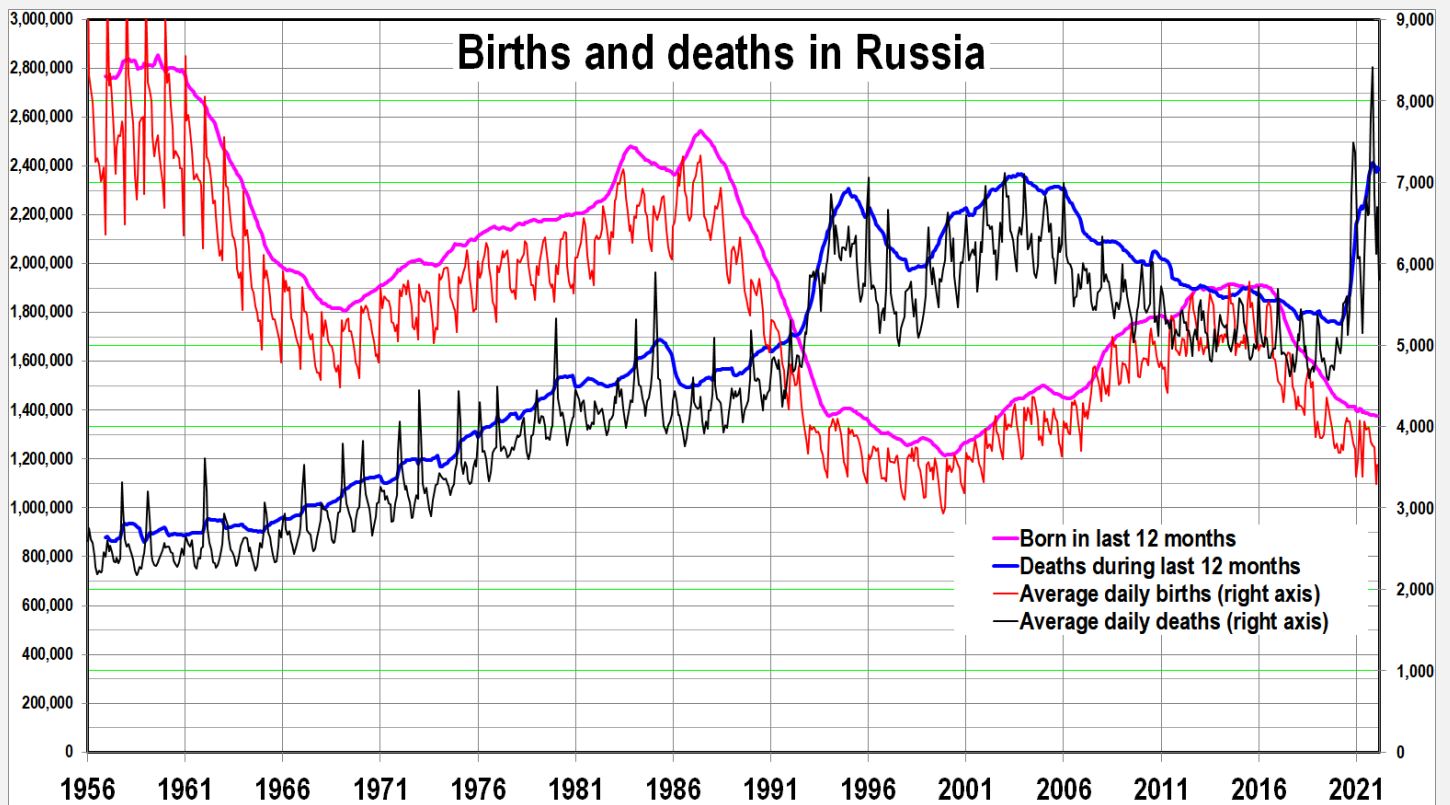
After the Russian invasion on February 24, 2022, the removal of Ukrainian children with subsequent rapid “adoption” or placement in Russian families quickly gained momentum. It is a topic that has recently gotten more coverage after Vladimir Putin paraded several such children from the occupied city of Mariupol at a pro-war rally in Moscow.

But it's also important to see the hard facts — and moral and legal significance — of what has actually happened across much of eastern Ukraine.

It is reported that hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian children affected by the war have been forcefully removed to Russian oblasts and provinces, ostensibly adopted by Russian families.

**Comment** - Let's not fool ourselves, and as mentioned in numerous Updates before, Russia has a demographic catastrophe on it's hands. Losing hundreds of thousands of soldiers either killed or severely wounded in its illegal invasion of its smaller neighbor, losing reportedly another million citizens fleeing the country after Putin announced mobilization last year and the world's highest death rate from alcoholism will see its abysmal fertility rate of 1.5 drop even further.

Russia needs to bolster its Slav population and the easiest manner of doing so at present is to abduct Ukrainian orphans and refugee children, transfer them to Russian Slav families and integrate them into the Russian state.



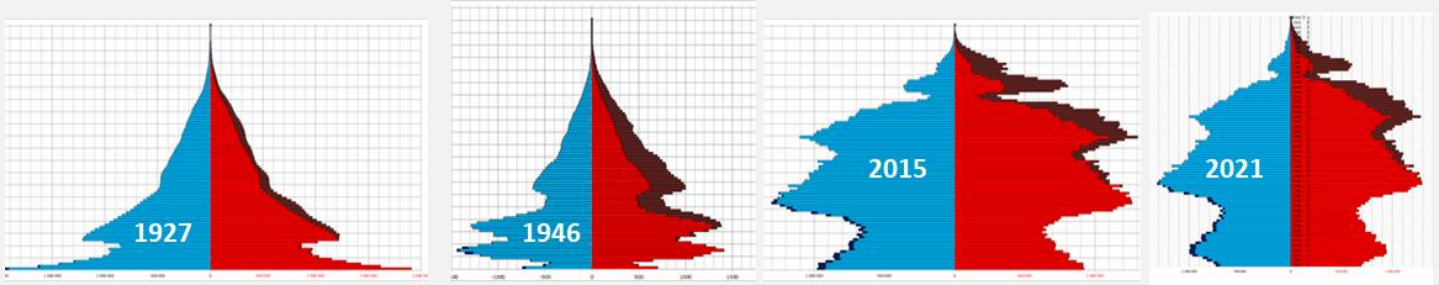
Viewing the above graph, one can see their dire situation – and even worse for Moscow – the steep war-related death curve from February last year is not reflected in this chart.

The fertility rate per child-bearing age woman has dropped precipitously since 1843, as can be seen in the graph below.

Fertility rate: children per woman, 1843 to 2016



Source: Gapminder (2017)  
 Note: The total fertility rate is the number of children that would be born to a woman if she were to live to the end of her child-bearing years and give birth to children at the current age-specific fertility rates.



Above are the periodic population profiles from Russia over the past century – a demographic disaster.

Birth rate per 1,000 population in 2020 was 9.8 whereas the death rate was 14.6 – and excluding the Ukrainian death rate thus far.