

# Conflict Update # 239

October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2022

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## Conflict Assessment

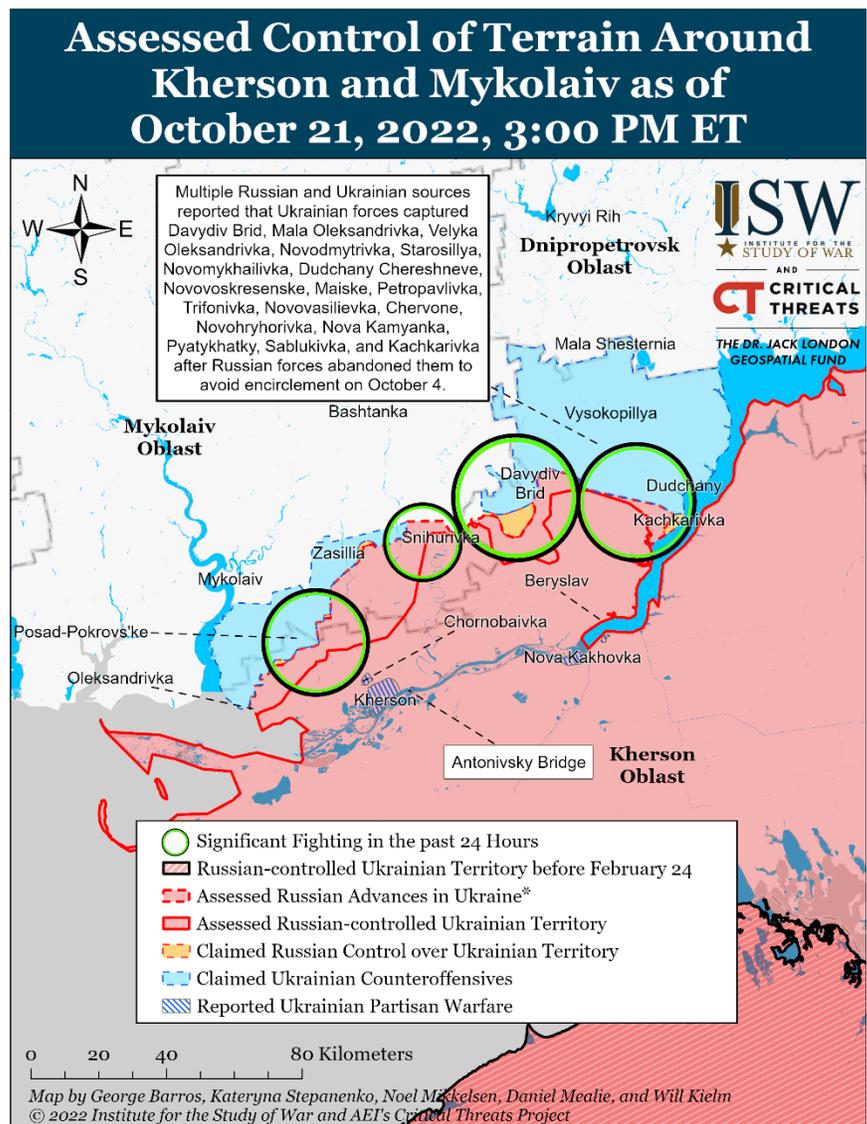
**Russian losses** - 67,070 (320) soldiers killed, 2,570 (6) enemy tanks, 5,266 (+8) armored combat vehicles, 1,653 (+5) artillery systems, 373 (+1) MLRS systems, 189 (+0) air defense systems, 270 (+1) warplanes, 243 (+0) helicopters, 1,341 (+16) UAVs of the operational-tactical level, 329 (+0) cruise missiles, 15 (+0) warships/cutters, 4,021 (+15) trucks and tankers, 4 Iskander Missile Launchers (+0), 76 fuel bowsers (+0) and 148 (+1) units of specialized equipment.

## Key Takeaways

**The Russian withdrawal from western Kherson Oblast has begun.** Russian forces intend to continue that withdrawal over the next several weeks but may struggle to withdraw in good order if Ukrainian forces choose to attack. Ukraine's Southern Operational Command stated yesterday Russian forces are "quite actively" transferring ammunition, military equipment, and some unspecified units from the Dnipro River's west bank to the east bank via ferries. It added that Russian forces deployed 2,000 mobilized men to hold the frontlines and are continuing to shell Ukrainian positions, likely in an effort to cover their withdrawal. Ukrainian military officials reported that the occupation administration is preparing the evacuation of imported Russian specialists, Ukrainian collaborators, and Kherson's banking system. Russian occupation administration in Beryslav and humanitarian facilities in Kherson City also reportedly ceased operations.

**Southern Ukraine: (Kherson Oblast)** - Russian forces began their withdrawal from western Kherson Oblast.

Ukrainian military officials yesterday offered a limited overview of the situation on the frontline and reported Russian forces struck Novoskresenske, Nova Kamianka, and Mala Seideminukha in northern Kherson Oblast. Russian sources in turn claimed that



Ukrainian forces withdrew from Nova Kamianka to Ukrainka to reinforce their units, and the Russian MoD claimed its forces struck a Ukrainian hangar in the settlement.

Geolocated footage showed the aftermath of Russian artillery strikes supposedly on Ukrainian efforts to advance south of Nova Kamianka, and some Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces attempted to advance in the Beryslav direction. The Russian MoD also claimed that Russian forces prevented Ukrainian counteroffensives in the Davydiv Brid-Sukhyi Stavok area near the Inhulets River. They also sources claimed that Ukrainian forces continued to shell settlements northwest of Kherson City.

Ukraine's Southern Operational Command emphasized that Russian forces are using Ukrainian civilians as human shields when transporting military equipment across the Dnipro River, while Russian sources released footage showing a line of civilians awaiting the ferry from Kherson City. Russian forces may be transporting withdrawing military personnel alongside civilians to limit Ukrainian strikes. The use of human shields is a war crime.

Ukrainian forces continued their interdiction campaign in Kherson Oblast by striking the Antonivsky Bridge the day before yesterday. Russian sources accused Ukrainian forces of killing four civilians who were reportedly crossing the bridge. Southern Operational Command Spokesperson Nataliya Humenyuk confirmed that Ukrainian forces struck the Antonivsky Bridge in the middle of the night and claimed that the presence of civilians on the bridge is not possible due to a Russian-imposed curfew in Kherson Oblast.

The Ukrainian General Staff (UGS) also confirmed that its forces struck a Russian pontoon crossing under the Antonivsky Bridge on October 19. Ukrainian forces otherwise continued to strike Russian positions and ammunition depots in northern and central Kherson Oblast.

### **Did Putin order withdrawal from Kherson?**

Russian officials have remained cagey about whether or not Putin ordered withdrawal from Kherson and are continuing to prepare the information space for such a collapse, as ISW has previously assessed. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov dodged a direct question from reporters addressing the withdrawal and yesterday directed reporters to the Ministry of Defense. One Russian milblogger noted that Russian forces "will receive bad news from Kherson Oblast" in the coming week and that "November will be very, very hard."

A Russian war correspondent told Russian state-controlled television on October 19 that Ukrainian forces outnumber Russian forces by four to one and that "there will be no good news in the next two months, that's for sure ... severe territorial losses are likely in these two months but defeat in one battle does not mean losing the war."

### **Kakhovka Hydroelectric Power Plant**

Russian forces will likely attempt to blow up the dam at the Kakhovka to cover their withdrawal and prevent Ukrainian forces from pursuing its forces deeper into Kherson Oblast.

Ukraine has no material interest in blowing the dam, which could flood 80 Ukrainian cities and displace hundreds of thousands of people while damaging Ukraine's already-tenuous electricity supply. Russia, however, has every reason to attempt to provide cover to its retreating forces and to widen the Dnipro River, which Ukrainian forces need to cross to continue their counteroffensive. Any claims that Russian forces would not blow the dam due to concerns for the water supply to Crimea are mistaken. Crimea survived without access to the canal flowing from the Dnipro since Russia illegally invaded and annexed it in 2014 through the restoration of access following Russia's invasion in February 2022.

**Human shields** - Ukraine's Southern Operational Command emphasized that Russian forces are using Ukrainian civilians as human shields when transporting military equipment across the Dnipro River, while Russian sources

released footage showing a line of civilians awaiting the ferry from Kherson City. (**Comment** – we reported on this over the past two days).

## **Russia holding Kherson**

Russian forces will try to hold eastern Kherson Oblast not for the water, but to provide a buffer zone to defend Crimea and prevent Ukrainian forces getting into artillery range of the peninsula. Their decisionmakers may believe that blowing the dam will enable them to retain that buffer zone. Zelensky warned yesterday that blowing the dam could cut water supplies to much of southern Ukraine and would pose a serious risk to the Zaporizhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP), which lies upstream of the dam. The ZNPP relies on water from the Kakhovka reservoir to cool its facilities.

## **Russian State and economy mobilization**

Putin is setting conditions for Russia to continue a protracted high-intensity conventional war in Ukraine, not a negotiated settlement or off-ramp. The information conditions that the Kremlin has set to enable the Kherson withdrawal, the preparations to blow the dam, and the preparations for additional mobilization and conscription all demonstrate that Putin is not seeking offramps in the near term.

Instead, he is setting conditions for improved Russian combat capability over the winter and well into 2023. He yesterday signed a decree creating a Russian government “coordination council” to “strengthen coordination of federal executive branch organs and the federal subjects’ executive branch organs” during the war in Ukraine.

Council responsibilities include coordinating federal and regional authorities to meet Russian military needs, resolving military supply issues, forming plans to supply the military; defining the volume and direction of the Russian state budget to support the military; and creating working groups on select issues, among other things.

His creation of the coordination council is a continuation of his October 19 declaration of martial law readiness standards, which the Kremlin seeks to use to expand Russian government authorities as way of further transiting Russia to a wartime footing.

A prominent Russian milblogger stated creation of this council is overdue and creation in spring 2022 would have prevented Russia’s logistics and supply problems from becoming so acute. It is a step that Putin need not take if he were seeking to wrap the war up soon or were looking for some sort of off-ramp or pause that he expected to end major combat operations.

The creation of this new coordinating body instead sets conditions for a high level of mobilization of the Russian state, economy, and society for continued high-intensity conventional military operations for the foreseeable future.

Putin continues to show his willingness to pay a high price in domestic discontent to pursue a military resolution of the war he initiated on his terms, showing through his actions a marked disinterest in any serious concessions or ceasefire negotiations that could lead to sustainable peace.

**Ukrainian forces have bombarded Russian positions in the occupied Kherson region**, targeting resupply routes across a major river while inching closer on Friday to a full assault on the key city. Associated Press reported that Russian-installed officials were said to be desperately trying to turn Kherson city – a prime objective for both sides because of its key industries and major river and seaport – into a “fortress” while attempting to evacuate tens of thousands of residents.

**Russia aims to cause new refugee crisis in Europe by striking Ukraine’s critical infrastructure.** Mykhailo Podolyak, an advisor to the head of the President's Office, said on Oct. 22 that it depends on European leaders whether Russian President Vladimir Putin would be able to implement his plan.

**Armed Forces push Russians out of Charivne, Chkalove settlements in Kherson Oblast.** The General Staff reported on Oct. 22 that Russian forces continue to leave the occupied parts of Kherson Oblast, adding that cases of looting and robbery of residents have become more frequent.

**Russian occupation government starts to dump water from Kakhovka reservoir.** Vladimir Leontiev, the head of the Russian occupation government in Nova Kakhovka in Kherson Oblast, said that "the discharge of water has been increased over the past week, so that in the event of a negative development, the amount of water flowing downstream would be smaller," Russian newspaper Kommersant reported. The "negative development" was an apparent reference to an explosion at the Russian-occupied Kakhovka Hydropower Plant in Kherson Oblast.

**Are Turkish mercenaries being sent to fight for Russia?** - A video has been gaining traction on social media allegedly showing Turkish mercenaries going to fight for Russia in the Ukraine war.

The video shows two soldiers holding a Turkish flag and expressing their readiness to get involved in the conflict.

"We are coming there with the help of Allah. We have our flag... We are gonna go and come back with the help of Allah," says a man with a Turkish flag attached to his bulletproof vest.

The second individual in the video is holding a Turkish flag and his uniform has a Turkish and Russian flag sown onto it. The letter 'Z' is visible on the Russian flag - a symbol of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, signaling the video is a recent one.

But are Turkish mercenaries really being sent to Ukraine?

Journalists from Euronews Turkish-language service confirmed that the men are speaking a dialect of Turkish but are not from Turkey.

The mix between this dialect and some Russian words signals that these men are most likely Ahiska Turks (also known as Meskhetian Turks).

According to the World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples, Meskhetian Turks used to live along the Turkish-Georgian border and were deported in 1944 by Joseph Stalin to various Central Asian Soviet republics, such as Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

In June 1989, Ahiska Turks in Uzbekistan were attacked by Uzbeks and more than 100 were killed. As a result, Soviet troops deported over 87,000 Ahiska Turks to Russia.

Today, many of them have since relocated to Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, and Russia including in the North Caucasus (such as Chechnya and North Ossetia).

Euronews spoke to a representative of Ahiska Turks abroad who confirmed that the men in the video are speaking the Ahiska dialect. He also explained that he believes these are men living in Russia and therefore being mobilized for the war in Ukraine.

**Ukraine targets Russia's ammunition depots, undermining its artillery advantage** - It is an almost everyday occurrence in the Russian-occupied parts of eastern and southern Ukraine.

Russia's ammunition depots blow up, with large fires erupting as tons of ordnance detonate for hours. Some of these incidents cause giant blasts with a radius of hundreds of meters.

Now that Ukraine has acquired advanced Western artillery and rocket systems, it has gradually begun a campaign to take out Russia's key military infrastructure. Over the last four weeks, nearly 20 Russian ammunition depots in Russian-occupied Donbas and Ukraine's south, including some of the largest, have been hit or completely destroyed.

As Russia continues with its slow but steady advance in Ukraine's eastern region of Donbas, Ukraine's military is working to undermine Russia's overwhelming artillery power and disrupt its logistics deep in occupied territories.

**Satellite imagery shows Wagner Group anti-tank fortifications in Ukraine's east.** Recently published satellite images from Maxar Technologies show a nearly two-kilometer anti-tank fortification of four rows of cement pyramids with a large trench behind them in the Russian-occupied town of Hirske in eastern Ukraine, CNN reports. According to CNN, Russian media outlets have reported from the site, calling it the "Wagner Line" in reference to the Russian state-backed private military company Wagner Group.

**Russia increases number of ships in Black Sea.** Ukraine's Southern Operational Command reported that Russia had increased its grouping of ships in the Black Sea to ten ships, which includes three surface-to-air missile carriers equipped with 24 Kalibr missiles.

**Ukraine shoots down Russian attack helicopter in Kherson Oblast.** The Ka-52 Alligator was downed on Oct. 22 in the region's Beryslav District, the southern operational command of Ukraine's Air Force reported. Ukraine has shot down 243 Russian helicopters since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion on Feb. 24, according to the General Staff.

**18 Russian cruise missiles shot down in Ukraine in one morning, 12 may have reached target.** The Air Force said that 13 X-101 missiles and 5 Kalibr missiles were shot down – alleging that 12 missiles reached their target.

**'Multiple conflicts' observed between Russian, Belarusian soldiers in Belarus.** The General Staff hasn't provided details or evidence to support the claim, only adding that the clashes have reportedly been happening due to "Russians' insolent attitude toward Belarusians."

**Russian troops in Belarus spur debate over the threat to Ukraine** - Russia is massing thousands of troops in its western neighbor Belarus, raising fears that Moscow might plan to open a new front in its war against Ukraine, but officials from Kyiv to Washington are casting doubt on whether the military buildup represents a serious threat.

With Russia already struggling to defend territory in eastern and southern Ukraine, it can ill afford to pick a new fight on a third front in the north on the border with Belarus, officials and analysts say.

"We have to be cautious, but I doubt that Russians are at this moment capable of opening another front line against Ukraine, at least not a successful front," Latvia's defense minister, Artis Pabriks said on Friday. He said some 10,000 of the Kremlin's forces were gathering in Belarus, possibly to try to disrupt the flow of Western weapons into Ukraine from Poland.

"They might be able to disrupt something, but it would not be like in February" at the start of Russia's military onslaught, said Mr. Pabriks, whose country is a NATO member bordering both Belarus and Russia, in an interview in Riga, the Latvian capital. "They are too weak now in my view."

Britain's Defense Ministry said in an intelligence assessment on Friday that the flurry of military activity in Belarus is "likely an attempt to demonstrate Russian-Belarusian solidarity and to convince Ukraine to divert forces to guard the northern border."

Some Western officials say the Russian move is probably just a feint or a training mission, while others say it could be preparation for an attack, though likely not a very effective one, but their views come with a heavy dose of uncertainty.

A Ukrainian general, Oleksiy Gromov, said on Thursday that the threat of a possible invasion from Belarus was growing. But Ukraine's military intelligence agency does not see an immediate danger, a spokesman, Vadym Skibitsky, said in an interview on Friday.

Several thousand newly mobilized Russian soldiers are deployed in Belarus at training sites, Mr. Skibitsky said, but they are not accompanied by the tanks, artillery or fuel trucks and other logistical support they would need to invade and face Ukraine's battle-hardened troops.

"We see these elements now moving into Belarus, but we do not see the movement of equipment," he said.

**Hundreds of thousands of people in central and western Ukraine** woke up today to power outages and periodic bursts of gunfire, as Ukrainian air defence tried to shoot down drones and incoming missiles. Kira Rudik, a member of the Ukrainian parliament, says 1.5 million people are without electricity after Russian strikes against power stations on Saturday.

**The long walk** – When Russia initially invaded Ukraine along multiple fronts, one via Belarus, which saw armored columns 40 miles long winding its way toward Kyiv, thinking it would be welcomed with raised arms and flowers.

Instead, Ukrainian forces targeted front and back vehicles, food trucks and petrol bowsers, bringing thousands of vehicles to an abrupt and completely unexpected halt.

No fuel and even less food, Russian soldiers, now hungry and without support, started walking back to Belarus, and this in turn degenerated into a full scale military rout.

**Russian military pantry running dry** – The Kremlin has introduced Iranian drones together with instructors and technicians. This speaks loudly to their ability to produce weaponry.

These drones are low-tech, slow and straight-flying. They get aimed at a target and sent off in flights of 5 – because perhaps one-in-ten will strike their target.

So why is Russia importing them, such low-tech easily manufactured "flying bombs?"

Because they have limited capacity to produce weapons, even as simple as these drones are. Their military manufacturing capacity has been so degraded that they have to buy from countries like North Korea and Iran, neither of which has any advanced technology, particularly Iran.

Their chip importing ability has been eviscerated by sanctions and the brain drain has seen most of their intellectual technology-acquainted folk leave in droves.

They are now producing fighter jets through manual assembly lines – one per year.

Their missile supply is limited to what they have in storage, as shown in Update #212 on October 15<sup>th</sup> showing how desperate they are.

So why then are they importing such low-tech weapons? Because that is what they have been reduced to – an emptying military pantry and even faster reducing capacity to replace weaponry.

## Putin

**How Putin cornered himself in Ukraine** - Serious fissures are appearing in the edifice of the Putin regime, and this is clearly the most uncertain period in the Putin era.

Putin is in a pickle. Nearly eight months after he launched his invasion to topple, it is his own government that is showing signs of strain. This has been exacerbated by his recent decisions to manage the political problems created in Russia by Ukraine's successful counteroffensive in the east and the south. That counteroffensive began in early August,

after Ukraine stopped Moscow's campaign to seize all of the Donbas, and made great advances, taking back more territory by mid-September than Moscow had seized since April.

Ukrainian success prompted calls from municipal officials across Russia for Putin to resign and sharp criticism of the war effort from uber-nationalists who insisted on escalation until victory. They also prompted criticism of Putin's Ukraine policy from an unlikely quarter, his BRIC buddies Xi Jinping and Narendra Modi at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit in Samarkand.

He responded with three risky measures: a "partial" **mobilization** to replenish his troops in Ukraine; dubious referenda in four Ukrainian oblasts only partly under Russian control that predictably yielded a vote in favor of joining Russia followed by their "**annexation**" and ever less subtle statements from senior Russian officials that these territories, if Ukrainian attacks continued, could be defended by all means available to the Kremlin, including **nuclear weapons**.

But the finesse failed as mobilization frightened hundreds of thousands of draft-age men to flee the country; provoked demonstrations in fifty cities and violent protests in Dagestan, from which Moscow had already taken a disproportionate number of Ukraine-bound soldiers; led to attacks on draft boards in twenty cities and on recruiting officers; and was followed by many reports on social media of ill-equipped new conscripts reduced to buying their own supplies.

It has become so troublesome for the Kremlin that senior figures such as Duma Speaker Vyacheslav Volodin, Federation Council President Valentina Matviyenko, and RT chief Margarita Simonyan criticized the implementation of the mobilization. This is a tried-and-true tactic in Russian governance—"if only the Czar knew"—to protect the leader when a policy goes bust.

Putin had hoped that rattling his nuclear saber would persuade the West and especially the US to pressure Zelenskyy into stopping the counteroffensive in territories now claimed by Moscow. Earlier this year, such threats had appeared to work as senior Biden administration officials had said on several occasions that they would not take sensible steps to help Ukraine—like facilitating the delivery of MIG fighter jets or sending longer-range artillery—in order to avoid provoking Moscow. But this time it did not work. Biden issued a strong public and private warning to Moscow that the use of nuclear weapons—even tactical low-yield nukes—would have devastating consequences for Russia.

More importantly, the counteroffensive continues. Putin took steps in Moscow on September 30 to formally "annex" those territories, only to be embarrassed the next day when Ukraine seized the key logistical town of Lyman in the Donetsk Oblast. Since then, Ukrainian forces have continued to advance in the east and are close to seizing the entire right bank of the Dnipro River near the crucial city of Kherson.

Equally bad for Putin, both strategically in Ukraine and politically at home, Ukraine on October 8 partly blew up the bridge across the Straits of Kerch, which provides essential supplies for Russian forces in both Crimea and Kherson.

Once again, Putin responded harshly in order to mollify Russian hawks: a massive bombing campaign designed to kill civilians and take out Ukraine's infrastructure and especially its electricity grid. While the campaign reportedly knocked out 30 percent of Ukraine's electricity supply temporarily, it also prompted NATO to decide to send Ukraine more sophisticated anti-aircraft systems that it had previously denied Kyiv. This will further enhance Ukraine's military capacity and complicate Russia's ability to reverse its sagging military fortunes.

Unsurprisingly, all this has further unsettled things in Moscow. Key regime figures are starting to position themselves for advantage under Putin. And a blame game has now started at senior levels to explain Moscow's failures in Ukraine. The principal targets are Defense Minister Shoigu, Chief of the General Staff Gerasimov, and Colonel General Lapin, commander of Russia's Central Military District. The principal of the Wagner mercenaries, Putin pal Yevgeny Prigozhin, has used his Telegram channels to go after Shoigu and the two generals. But Shoigu also has the means to fight back,

which may explain why Alexei Slobodenyuk, who works for Prigozhin on media matters, was recently arrested. Meanwhile, Chechen strongman Ramzan Kadyrov has allied with Prigozhin in attacking Shoigu and the generals.

Putin has shrewdly not been publicly involved in this, but he just gave a boost to Kadyrov by promoting him to colonel general. What this means for Russian policy remains to be seen, but Kadyrov's recent activity on the war underscores the dilemma facing Putin. Kadyrov did the easy thing, making global headlines by advocating the use of tactical nukes in Ukraine. But recognizing the political toxicity of mobilization, his public statements conveniently point out that Chechnya, to date, has been overrepresented on the Ukraine front. For Kadyrov too, the Ukraine war is not existential; and he will not risk his position in Chechnya publicly calling on more Chechens to fight there, even if behind the scenes his minions are trying to provide some conscripts. And now there are reports that senior officials are directly confronting Putin with concerns about his failing Ukraine policy.

None of this necessarily means Putin is going down soon. We simply do not know enough about power dynamics in Russia. But serious fissures are appearing in the edifice of the Putin regime, and this is clearly the most uncertain period in the Putin era.

Russian history teaches that losing wars is not good for monarchs or authoritarians, and often leads to liberalizing change, at least for a while—as happened in 1905, 1917, and 1989. Putin is hoping to avoid defeat in Ukraine and this fate by issuing increasingly shrill warnings that he might use nuclear weapons unless Ukraine ceases its current counteroffensive in the recently “annexed” areas of Ukraine not fully controlled by the Kremlin.

As long as the West stands strong against this dubious threat and continues to give Ukraine the weapons it needs to push back Moscow's aggression, the Russian leadership will have no alternative but to give up its imperial plans for Ukraine and other neighbors. (*John E. Herbst is a former U.S. ambassador to Ukraine and Uzbekistan*).

## Humanitarian

**Dutch MPs want Putin tribunal set up in The Hague** - MPs from the lower house of the parliament want the Hague to set up a tribunal to try Russian President Vladimir Putin for the Ukraine war.

A motion brought forward by MP Sjoerd Sjoerdsma Democrats 66 party (D66) called for a special tribunal in The Hague to try Putin and his Russian associates in the future and was supported by a majority of the House of Representatives.

“It is very important that Putin, the one behind this terrible war in Ukraine, does not get away with it with impunity when this war is over,” said Sjoerdsma, RTL Nieuws reported.

Sjoerdsma believes the Hague should be the place to set this all up as the International Criminal Court, which previously successfully convicted war criminals with special tribunals, is located there. A separate tribunal will be needed because “it is now legally impossible through the International Criminal Court. There is not a single tribunal that can try him now,” said Sjoerdsma, according to RTL Nieuws.

**How Russia organized its torture chamber network in Kharkiv Oblast** – Survivor testimonies reveal the sheer scale of Russia's highly-organized plans to round up Ukrainian war veterans, volunteers, and civilians in a widespread network of torture chambers scattered across Kharkiv Oblast.

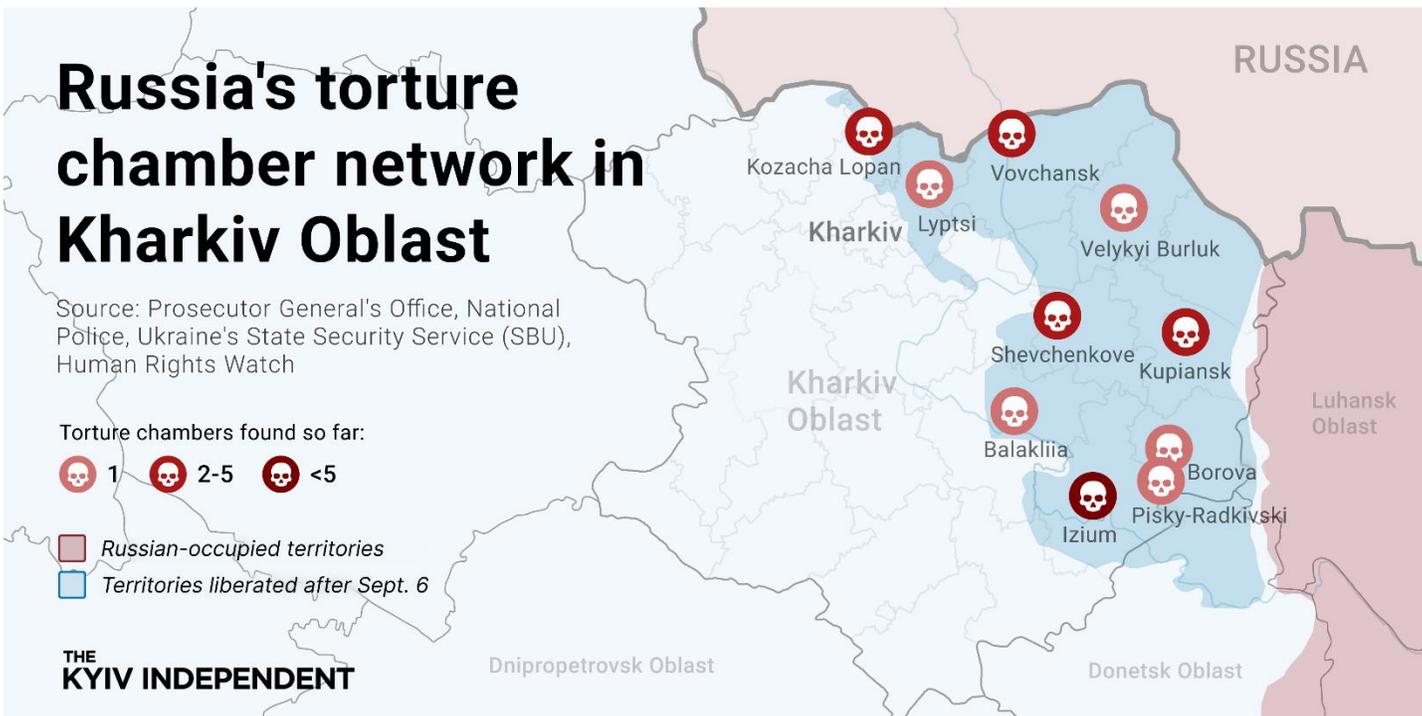
### Police station torture chamber

As a Ukrainian war veteran who served when Russia invaded Crimea and Donbas in 2014, Chepurnyi knew he had a target on his back. He served from 2001 as part of compulsory military service and then in the State Border Guard Service until 2014.

He said that Russian soldiers arrested him while he was doing utility work on a road nearby on July 28. They immediately brought him to Velykyi Burluk's police station, where they made him wait the whole day in a cell without water and access to toilets.

"They took me away at 9 a.m., they didn't give me water or anything," he said. "Then, at 10 p.m., they came to me, put a bag on my head, tied my hands, and took me away."

The Kyiv Independent had access to the Velykyi Burluk police station that Russian forces had taken over during the occupation. The station was heavily damaged during Ukraine's September counteroffensive.



*As of Oct. 6, local authorities uncovered 22 torture chambers in the Kharkiv Oblast in the wake of Ukraine's liberation of Russia-occupied territories. Russian forces set up detention centers in almost every city and village where they were based, often using the police station to detain and torture civilians, including Ukrainian veterans. Reports of torture by electric shock, severe beatings, nails being torn off, suffocation with gas masks, and rapes, keep emerging as local authorities investigate Russia's war crimes in the region. (Lisa Kukharska/ The Kyiv Independent)*

### Systematic torture

Russian forces arrested a handful of people, all Ukrainian veterans, in Velykyi Burluk, including Chepurnyi and Serhiy's brothers.

They took them to Vovchansk, three kilometers south of the Russian border.

There, an old factory was turned into a detention center where civilians, including war veterans, were tortured. Serhiy's brother was kept there for 21 days, and Chepurnyi for over a month.

Survivors were adamant tormentors were Russians and not from Kremlin proxies in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts.

"It was the FSB (Russia's Federal Security Service)," they said. "Their accents were very Russian."

Some prisoners surrendered to torture, citing the example of one man who was released after four or five days. It is thought this man revealed the position of Ukrainian troops, but this has not been confirmed.

Other Ukrainian soldiers confirmed that war veterans had been tortured in Vovchansk, an account also established by locals to Ukrainian media outlet Hromadske, saying "young guys had been tortured with electric shocks for weeks."

One of the medics in Vovchansk, who declined to disclose her name, fearing Russia would renew its offensive, concurred. "They tortured a lot of people," she said, "but we couldn't approach the victims (to help)."

## Russian mobilization

**More than 20,000 convicts drafted out of Russian prisons** - The number of convicts conscripted for the war in Ukraine out of Russian prisons has exceeded 20,000. The Russian news outlet Agentstvo ("Agency") reported this figure, citing Olga Romanova, the head of Russia Behind Bars (RBB), a non-profit advocate for the incarcerated.

## Containment

**West, Russia clash at UN over Iranian drone use in Ukraine** - Tehran accused of violating Security Council resolution anchoring 2015 nuclear deal by supplying Moscow with UAVs that have allegedly been used to attack civilians, power plants.

The United States and key Western allies accused Russia on Friday of using Iranian drones to attack civilians and power plants in Ukraine in violation of a 2015 UN Security Council resolution and international humanitarian law.

Russia countered by accusing Ukraine of attacking infrastructure and civilians for eight years in the eastern separatist regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, which Russian President Vladimir Putin illegally annexed earlier this year.

The US, France, Germany and Britain supported Ukraine's call for UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to send a team to investigate the origin of the drones.

Russian Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia said the drones are Russian and warned that an investigation would violate the UN Charter and seriously affect relations between Russia and the United Nations.

**The Japanese prime minister, Fumio Kishida, warned today that Russia using nuclear** weapons would be seen as an "act of hostility against humanity." Kishida, who leads the only country ever hit with a nuclear bomb, described President Vladimir Putin's sabre rattling as "deeply disturbing."

**Spain on Saturday said it would send 14 fighter jets to Bulgaria and Romania** to bolster NATO's eastern flank as the defence alliance strengthens its deterrence capacity following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

**Scholz explains why he's refusing to send German tanks to Ukraine.** German Chancellor Olaf Scholz told Die Welt that his country does not want to "act alone", meaning that other Western countries should also send such tanks if Germany does. Scholz also said that 20-30% of Germans don't agree with the sanctions against Russia and arms deliveries to Ukraine. Scholz has been repeatedly accused of blocking arms supplies to Ukraine.

## Chinese intentions regarding Taiwan

**China says don't interfere as U.S. navy warns Taiwan war could be this year** - Beijing has responded to the U.S. Navy's warning of a potential Chinese attack on Taiwan as soon as this year by cautioning Washington against any intervention on the sensitive geopolitical issue at the core of strained ties between the top two powers.

Speaking at an event hosted by the Atlantic Council on Wednesday, U.S. Naval Operations Chief Admiral Michael Gilday discussed his force's preparation for a potential conflict erupting in the Taiwan Strait, where Chinese President Xi Jinping has long vowed to reunite the mainland with the self-ruling island over which Beijing claims sovereignty.

Having told Congress last year that a Chinese effort to take the disputed island by force could take place by 2027, known as the "Davidson window" after retired U.S. Indo-Pacific Command Chief Admiral Philip Davidson, Gilday qualified his assessment, noting that, for two decades, China had delivered "every promise they've made earlier than they said they were going to deliver on it."

**Comment** – China will be keenly aware of the US' "First Island Chain" defense strategy which, once invoked, will immediately lock down all Chinese sea ports, strangling their economy within weeks. The Ukrainian invasion has sent a clear message to Beijing about invading Taiwan – "It will not be over in a few days."

Russia firmly believed they would walk into Ukraine and complete the takeover within a week. They even had Ukrainian folk lined up to replace Zelenskyy and his party. As we all know, this didn't transpire and eight months later and heavily counting, not only are they still there but in dire straits.

Both China and Russia believe that rapid and clear victory – within days or weeks – would effectively alienate any international intervention, leaving them in control of the vanquished territories. It would over so quick that the West would not be able to realistically react or mobilize.

Ukraine proved the folly of this blind assumption. It would not be surprising if Russia and China jointly discussed this as an element of invasion, during the pre-Olympic Putin/Xi talks.

Taiwan is not Ukraine. Firstly it is surrounded by water, and any landing of invading forces will be forced to the southwestern zone, where water draft levels are very shallow. This forces China to disembark its entire landing force in order to transfer them to shallow-draft landing craft. A recipe for defeat.

Russia has shown the world the folly of its strategy, and Beijing will clearly have watched in dismay. It is now boldly illustrated that invading Taiwan, an island nation with a far better equipped and more well-trained military force than Ukraine ever had, is never going to be an easy task, if possible at all.

It also showed that, by being an elongated and protracted maneuver, the advantage of an quick and decisive campaign eliminating international positioning in favor of the invaded island, is no longer really feasible.

Invading Taiwan will require the largest campaign in military history, and something China is in no position to accomplish. Its army is an inward-facing structure, not designed to invading other states. It has of late attempted to change this strategic direction.

And its military prowess is far behind that of the US and its allies.

### **Chinese naval capacity and ability**

China's military buildup of the last 30 years has concentrated heavily on air and naval forces necessary to launch an air and sea invasion of Taiwan.

The People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) has received a huge boost in recent years, changing from a green water coastal navy to a full-scale, blue water navy capable of operating in all the world's major oceans. PLAN currently boasts two aircraft carriers with a third under construction and may build as many as six.

It has also embarked upon a dramatic amphibious ship construction effort, building eight Type 071 landing platform dock ships, each capable of landing up to a battalion's worth of marines on hostile territory, by ship or Type 726 hovercraft.

It has also built two Type 075 amphibious assault ships similar to the U.S.'s Wasp-class ships, with plans for six more. A total of 32 large amphibious ships, 16 medium ships, and 29 tank landing ships could conceivably transport all eight brigades of PLAN Marine Corps in a first wave of an invasion.

Meanwhile, the People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) has been building up its fighter, bomber, and air transport forces. Fighters like the Chengdu J-10 and J-20 would attempt to establish air superiority over Taiwan, while modernized Xi'an H-6 bombers strike critical targets with precision guided weapons.

Could China be ready for this scenario by 2027? Probably not. It would most likely take until 2035 to build enough sealift to transport the invasion force. China would also be smart to build more sealift than it needs, as each ship will have to make multiple trips to and from the island, exposed during each run to Taiwanese (and likely American) ships, planes, and submarines.

For all its manpower and firepower, the PLA hasn't fought a war since 1979 — a disastrous invasion of Vietnam. Amphibious invasions are among the most logistically complex operations in warfare, and it will take heavy casualties during a crossing of the Strait and a landing on Taiwan's shores.

Even if Taiwan's government were to fall quickly, China could find itself fighting a long and protracted insurgency in mountainous and heavily urbanized terrain.

And most importantly, as mentioned above and in previous Updates, America strangling the Chinese economy via invocation of the "First Island Chain" reaction, will see it pushed to the precipice of disaster while trying to fund its invasion.

### **Intertwined**

The Taiwanese and Chinese economies are deeply intertwined — China accounts for more than 40 percent of Taiwan's exports, and hundreds of thousands of Taiwanese live on the mainland — but polls show that Taiwan's citizens, particularly younger ones, are only becoming more anti-Chinese in their outlook and more staunchly "Taiwanese" in their personal identity.

As one Taiwanese political scientist recently told the New York Times, "The attractiveness of the carrots in China's Taiwan policy — economic inducements — has now fallen to its lowest point since the end of the Cold War."

### **Ruling Taiwan**

Invading a country is one thing, subjugating and ruling it is an entirely different matter. It is estimated that any overthrow of Taiwan will subsequently require millions of Chinese administrators and enforcement troops. Not a viable solution.

**America defending Taiwan** – On multiple occasions now President Biden has intimated that the US will intervene on behalf of Taiwan, should China invade the island nation.

### **Why would he say so?**

Because, as laid out in the preceding article, China will not invade Taiwan and if it attempts to, will find it incredibly difficult if not impossible to succeed. And that is without taking into account any US or western engagement.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has put paid to any Chinese thought about a quick and easy campaign.

The US knows this and is quietly thankful to Russia for illustrating the folly of such an attempt at invasion – so now it can act far more energetically and safely in this regard.

China knows this as well as the US does and will pivot to reassess its options and to protect its image of being a strong country with regard to any Taiwanese talk of secession.

**Chinese struggles ahead** - China as a nation, has huge challenges directly ahead of it, and over the next decade will be struggling to maintain its course as the growing global bi-polar protagonist. Some of these are listed below.

### **Demographic challenge**

China is grudgingly acknowledging it has over-counted its population by 100 million plus. This is a demographic catastrophe because this undercount centers on the >45 years of age demographic of post-one-child policy citizens and intensely on young women – child-bearing aged young women.

As mentioned in yesterday's Update, a "demographically healthy" country will have a balance of (i) children, (ii) young workers and (iii) mature workers. China has a dearth of the first two – devastating for future growth and manpower stability. Losing 100 million, of whom the majority are child-bearing aged women, enormously undermines future demographic projections for the Chinese.

It is estimated that, by 2030, there will be more Chinese pensioners than workers – demographically and economically calamitous.

### **Funding challenge**

China has a tax base contributing some 9½ per cent of its GDP, whereas the US sees a contribution level of around 25½ per cent. China obtains its funding primarily out of the structured federal/state/city levels where real estate is used to multiply revenue and provide funding.

More of this in a future issue but suffice it to say that this is woefully inadequate and a financial disaster heading straight towards Beijing.

### **Import/export challenge**

China's manufacturing sector is basically an extension of its export customers' economies. It is an outward-facing economy geared to foreign exchange. It is not an inward-facing country because the vast majority of Chinese citizens exist in a poverty zone akin to that of Nigeria, as mentioned in yesterday's Update.

Its people cannot afford to buy Chinese products.

So any move by the US and EU – together around 68% of Chinese foreign income – to downscale imports of Chinese-manufactured goods will have a devastating effect on Chinese GDP achievement and its economy.

### **Poverty challenge**

It is estimated that 1.1 billion Chinese live in poverty. A huge number of these were drafted into newly-built cities to form a cheap labor base for its manufacturing requirement with labor being the primary means of production.

China built an expansive HSR (High Speed Rail) network costing trillions of dollars, in order to rapidly transport these working folk between manufacturing economic zones and residential areas.

Workers cannot afford planes, trains and automobiles to move around, so Beijing made this possible with its rail network, which needed to be extremely fast in order to move millions of workers over long distances into and out of these manufacturing zones on a 24/7 basis.

These workers have to keep working in order to live and to send money back to their families in the Chinese hinterland.

## **Technology challenge**

China manufactures low-grade microchips geared to low-grade products. Taiwan and South Korea produce the global majority of modern, high-grade microchips.

The US has recently and continues to introduce restrictive sanctions against China obtaining any chips made with American chip making equipment or produced through American design or sourced technology.

This is catastrophic from a Chinese perspective as it retards their development some 25 to 30 years.

They are struggling to create China-centric internal fab (fabrication) centers, but each fab costs billions and takes years to commission, never mind plan. It costs as much to build one “fab” as it costs to build a nuclear power plant.

And this is sunk capital as every two years the technology doubles – Moore’s Law - Moore’s Law is the observation that the number of transistors on integrated circuits doubles approximately every two years. This regularity of change is important as the capabilities of digital electronic devices are inextricably linked to the number of transistors.

This is why there is a dearth of private investment in the western world in “fabs” – investors invest for a financial return, not to be patriotic and philanthropic – they want a return on their investment and would rather invest in a nuclear power plant with a 60-year “annuity return,” than in something requiring bi-annual capital injection.

Invading Taiwan will need Chinese forces to land in the southwestern corner of the island – the other coastlines are cliffs – and this is where the majority of Taiwanese microchip fabs are located. They will be damaged in any invasion.

The Chinese technology clock is ticking.

## **Social challenge**

Chinese millennials have the highest global comparative percentage of apartment ownership – last count was 18%. And these millennials of late are largely refusing to pay their mortgages, together with other demographic groups.

Real estate is a key sector of the Chinese economy. Since the housing reform of 1998, which ended free distribution of housing by employers and established a housing finance system, the Chinese real estate market experienced a long-lasting era of prosperity. In 2020, the total sales revenue in the real estate market exceeded 17 trillion yuan (US\$2,3 trillion). Coupled with the tax funding multiplier mentioned above, this is a huge risk area.

## **Water challenge**

In China, one of the world’s fastest growing economies, water is running out. The country’s 1.4 billion population needs the vital resource to thrive, but it has become limited and unevenly distributed.

After decades of urbanization and pollution, China is now faced with both water shortages and flooding - only made worse by the effects of climate change. And pollution is making water quality worse, meaning much of the water available is unusable. Insufficient management of local resources plays a part too.

North China is particularly impacted. It suffers from water shortages throughout the year, whereas South China, despite sufficient quantities, experiences only seasonal scarcity. One of the problems is that 80 per cent of water is concentrated in South China, yet the North is the core of national development.

'Sponge cities' are trying to solve the water crisis

A ‘sponge city’ is a nature-based solution which uses the landscape to retain water at its source, slow down water flow and clean it throughout the process.

The focus is to retain rainwater in urban areas by waterproofing the paved floor so that part of it evaporates and the rest is gradually drained. As well as proofing the roads and pavements, more trees are planted, and smart buildings constructed to adapt to the city's sponge. This means roofs are covered in grass for greater absorption of water and buildings are also painted in light colors to reflect more heat instead of absorbing it.

With more and more demand growing for the sponge city model as we near 2030, 70 per cent of Chinese cities are scrambling to draw up plans. But this will take decades in development time.

### **Manufacturing challenge**

The latest data in the CNBC Supply Chain Heat Map shows China is losing more manufacturing to Vietnam, Malaysia, Bangladesh, India, and Taiwan.

## **Geopolitics**

**EU rings alarm bell on China — but isn't sure how to respond** - It's not the kind of talks China wants Brussels to have — let alone on the cusp of President Xi Jinping prolonging his reign.

Just a day before the Communist Party congress concludes on Saturday and essentially dubs Xi the Chinese leader for life, EU leaders officially began a collective rethink about the bloc's increasingly fraught relationship with China, displaying a sense of urgency unseen prior to the Russian war against Ukraine.

In a three-hour-long conversation, the 27 EU leaders one by one took the floor at the European Council meeting in Brussels to express their heightened concern.

But while the diagnosis was unanimous — Beijing has grown increasingly bellicose on both the military and economic fronts while cozying up to a warmongering Russia — the recommended treatments were disparate.

Some equated the situation to the EU's misread of its relationship with Russia. Others shied away from the direct parallel but nevertheless called for the EU to reduce its dependency on China's technology and raw materials. Then there were those — notably including German Chancellor Olaf Scholz — who insisted the EU must remain a beacon of global trade, even with China.

The varying opinions reflect the difficulties the EU will face in the years ahead as China shifts from looming threat to imminent menace.

"We must not repeat the fact that we have been indifferent, indulgent, superficial in our relations with Russia," Italy's outgoing Prime Minister Mario Draghi implored in a closing press conference, relaying the message that many leaders offered during the discussion.

"Those that look like business ties," he added, "are part of an overall direction of the Chinese system, so they must be treated as such."

## **Sanctions**

**Iran's foreign ministry has strongly condemned a call** by France, Germany and Britain for the UN to probe accusations that Russia has used drones from Iran to attack Ukraine. Ukraine says that Russia has used Iranian-made Shahed-136 attack drones. If true, the allegations would mark a breach of UN security council resolution 2231.

**Unprecedented boom makes Russia India's seventh biggest trading partner** - Fertilizers and fuel accounted for over 91% of India's total imports from Russia in 2022.

India's trade relations with Russia have deepened this year, largely due to the war in Ukraine.

The country's bilateral trade with Russia has risen to a record high of \$18.2 billion between April and August, according to India's ministry of commerce and industry. This was mainly fuelled by a surge in the import of oil and fertilizers.