Conflict Update # 151

August 14th, 2022

Conflict Assessment

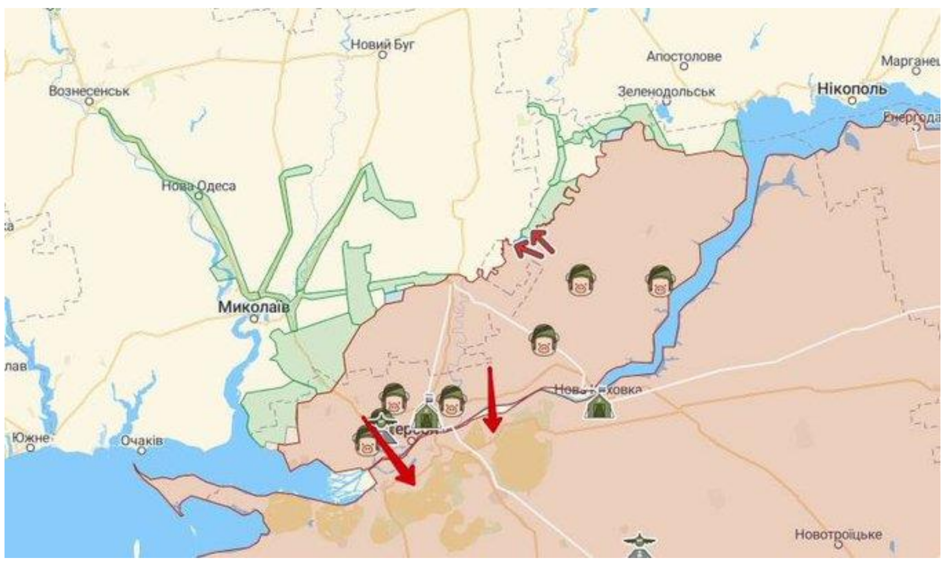
Key Takeaways

Russian losses – 43,550 Russian soldiers and personnel have been killed with an estimated 130,650 injured, 1,864 tanks, 4,126 armored vehicles, 136 air defense systems, 233 aircraft, 194 helicopters, 784 drones, 980 artillery systems, 261 anti-aircraft missiles, 187 cruise missiles, 15 ships and boats, 91 units of special equipment and 3,039 other vehicles and fuel tanks.

Russia loses 19 tanks and armored vehicles in a single day - Russia has faced significant losses of tanks and armored vehicles following the actions of Ukraine forces, according to reports.

Ukrainska Pravda, a Ukrainian online newspaper, reported that on Saturday Kyiv forces were successful in destroying eight tanks and 11 armored vehicles.

According to the post, A total of 43,550, of Russia's military personnel have been killed with an additional 150 killed on Saturday.



Kherson bridges out, Russians face supply nightmare, Russian occupational government flees - The Russian frontline in Kherson may be on its last legs as Ukrainian forces continue their counteroffensive toward the Dnieper River.

Previous Ukrainian attacks crippled both main bridges near the occupied city and the road crossing upriver at the Nova Kakhovka hydroelectric plant. Despite the Russians' confounding use of radar reflectors near the bridges, subsequent strikes have occupied forces reliant on ferries to keep supplies and personnel moving, if barely at all.

But reports from the Ukrainian administration in nearby Mikolayiv suggest the leadership of the Russia-backed occupational government fled Kherson and crossed the river yesterday. It was not clear whether Russian military commanders had also evacuated across the river. If true, it may be a sign that Russian forces are preparing a withdrawal to defensive positions on the south bank.

Yesterday's intelligence update from the British MoD indicated that Russian forces' endurance west of the river may depend on their stockpiles now that supply lines are all but cut. Those stockpiles are still vulnerable to Ukrainian attack as evidenced by the large explosions in Nova Kakhovka yesterday.

Russia's precarious situation on the Dnieper gives Ukraine serious leverage on the attack knowing the opponent cannot be easily resupplied. Continued Ukrainian advances may force Russia to switch from reinforcing its position to evacuating what it can, assuming that shift hasn't already occurred.

Another ammo depot in Nova Kakhovka has been destroyed

Ukrainian forces destroyed another major Russian arms depot as seen in the video image alongside.

It is strangling invading forces by eliminating arms sites and limiting access to re-supply and troop reinforcement requirements along all major Russian routes capable of sustaining heavy vehicular movements.

As such enemy forces are compelled to use pontoons and barges to cross rivers to reach front lines, which in turn renders crossing operations vulnerable to further attacks by Ukrainian long-range artillery and missile fire.

Partisans stationed along and in close proximity to crossing points and bridges relay precise (Russian troop) coordinates to Ukrainian field signals units, whereafter accurate fire is directed at the troops and equipment crossing a river. It is estimated that Russia is losing around 150 to 200 soldiers per day.

This may also speak to the Russian ploy at present of recruiting inexperienced troops, providing them with minimal training and immediately sending them into battle.

Ukraine uses drone to attack Russian drone-tracking equipment – Video footage shared on Telegram, Twitter, and Reddit this week shows a Ukrainian unmanned aerial vehicle dropping explosives on a Russian electronic control station designed to help troops detect and counter drones. The video, recorded by a rotary-blade drone adapted to drop grenades and other munitions, shows explosives being dropped on the radio monitoring station.

Ukraine Weapons Tracker, a popular English-language war analysis account on Twitter, reposted the video and revealed that the target was a "modern Russian RLK-MC-A (ROSC-1) complex" that was "specially developed to counter enemy drones."

"Here we see munitions being dropped right on its electronic control and radio monitoring subsystems. The RLK-MC-A appeared to be completely helpless," the post reads.

Ukraine's RK-3 Korsaw destroys 3 Russian vehicles - While the Stugna-P anti-tank guided missile (ATGM) system is much more recognizable, Ukraine's portable ATGM, the RK-3 Korsaw, is proving a valuable asset for Ukrainian troops as fighting intensifies in the country's east. This ATGM, the smallest ever developed in Ukraine, was caught on camera recently. The footage proved that portable missile systems can be just as destructive as larger ones.

In the footage, three Russian armored vehicles are seen driving on narrow roads. They are struck by three missiles.

Cyber Warfare

12% - The United States is home to just 12% of the world's semiconductor manufacturing capacity (down from roughly 40% in 1990). The recently passed CHIPS and Science Act of 2022 seeks to lessen U.S. reliance on foreign manufacturing sources, while investing in a local workforce and spurring innovation at home.

92% - The global dominance of TSMC (Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company) on production of the advanced 5 nano chip.

US$100b – Investment TSMC is making to produce the 3 nano chip over the next 3 years.

2 Nano chip – TSMC has this on the drawing board already.

Sanctions

47 of the world's biggest 200 companies still haven't left Russia. Now the Kremlin is preparing 'expropriation blackmail,' an expert says - In the six months since Russia invaded Ukraine, around 300 global companies have exited the Russian market, and another 700 have halted new investments and projects, or curbed operations in the country.

Western firms from the U.S. and Europe dominate the long list, which includes banks Citi and Goldman Sachs, apparel brands like Burberry and Adidas, and technology giants like IBM, Intel, Snap and Twitter, according to research from the Yale School of Management.

The large-scale corporate exodus, alongside tough western sanctions, has devastated the Russian economy—reversing decades of foreign investment and cooperation—despite the Kremlin's continued petrodollar inflow and its insistence that Russia is faring just fine.

But not all global companies have retreated from the country. Around 47 of the world's 200 biggest companies are still doing business in or with Russia. The process of leaving, after all, can come with major costs. Now, after concerning new moves from the Kremlin, experts say the companies that stayed are now at heightened risk of nationalization as Russia wrestles with how to best deal with the mass corporate exodus and seeks greater control of their economy.

Political and reputational pressure pushed companies to exit Russia in a hurry after the Ukraine invasion.

But making a clean break with the country has proved to be costly and complex, and many companies that previously announced their intention to leave have continued to do business there as they evaluate how to get out without losing too much money.

Companies, including many from Japan and China, are still all in on the Russian market. Resource-poor Japan, which has condemned Putin's war on Ukraine, has continued their oil and gas partnerships with the country. "Our policy is not to withdraw," Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said earlier this year.

If it was once a difficult decision for companies to stay in Russia or leave, it could get a lot easier if Putin decides for them.

On July 1, he signed a decree to allow the government to seize the Sakhalin-2 oil and natural gas project. The Kremlin order gave control of Sakhalin-2 to a new, state-created firm that could strip foreign investors of their rights if it wants to, one of the most forceful moves by the government in response to the corporate exodus. U.K. energy giant Shell and Japanese trading firms Mitsui and Mitsubishi hold double-digit stakes in the Russian energy project.

This month, the two Japanese investors took a $1 billion-plus hit on its Sakhalin-2 assets after writing down the valuation after Putin's decree. Mitsui and Mitsubishi have stated their desire to remain on the project but are uncertain where their future stands.

The decree demonstrates that Russia is not just willing to expropriate foreign assets but is also positioning itself to engage in "expropriation blackmail," Mark Dixon, founder of the Moral Rating Agency, a research organization focused on foreign firms in Russia, wrote in a July report.

The Sakhalin-2 case shows that foreign investors have already been expropriated, and that Russian authorities are giving them the chance to either agree to the new terms of the new entity that now controls the energy project—or lose everything, Dixon told Fortune this week.

10 Russian planes stuck in Germany - Almost six months after the closure of the EU airspace for Russian airplanes, ten aircraft owned or controlled by Russia are still in Germany, Redaktionsnetzwerk Deutschland (RND) reported on Sunday, citing the German Ministry of Transport.

"Since the planes are subject to a take-off and flight ban due to the EU sanctions regime, they cannot be used by the owner and cannot be taken to another location," the ministry was quoted as saying.

According to the report, there are three Russian Antonov AN-124 machines on the ground in Leipzig, a Bombardier BD-100-1A10 Challenger 300 and a Boeing 737 in Cologne, and a Boeing 747 in Frankfurt-Hahn. Another four aircraft are in Baden-Baden: a Cessna 750 Citation X, two Embraer ERJ-135BJ Legacy 600 and a Bombardier BD-700-1A10 Global Express XRS.

In response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the EU closed its airspace for Russian airplanes in late February.

China

'One China' principle - What is 'One China'? Is it the Peoples Republic of China (PRC) and Taiwan (ROC) combined? Is it China counted together with all that the Communist 'mainland' has annexed over the past many decades, cases in point being Tibet, Xinjiang and more recently, Hong Kong? If so, how is it that almost every country of the world adheres to the stern 'One China' principle?

Does the world accept Chinese control over Taiwan, Tibet, Xinjiang and other provinces as an eternal and unchangeable reality? If so, how does the world also claim to support the status quo across the Taiwan Strait?

Maintaining the status quo of Taiwan would essentially require China not to launch any military offensive against the island nation to incorporate it into its own territory.

However, if the world accepts Taiwan as a part of China, how can it in any manner oppose such imminent Chinese use of force against Taipei?

This is the paradox of the famed 'One China' principle. The One China policy is diabolical and inherently contradictory to what the world claims to stand for. Yet, much of the world adheres to this Chinese policy, which quite frankly, is a relic of the past and an outright abomination.

Recently, subsequent to US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's historic visit to Taiwan, the US' government proclaimed that Washington still adheres to the One China principle. Simultaneously, it called on China to maintain the status quo across the Taiwan Strait. For its indecisiveness, the US has invented a term which it likes to throw around whenever it is called upon to take a decisive stand on the Taiwan front – "strategic ambiguity."

This "strategic ambiguity" is what helped the US and China forge enormously beneficial trade ties over the past two decades. The U.S. has never entirely committed to coming to Taiwan's rescue in the event the island faces a Chinese invasion, though it has not ruled out the same as well. To an extent, this ambiguity kept Beijing on its toes two decades ago.

Now, China just doesn't care.

The One China principle is the diplomatic acknowledgement of China's position that there is only one Chinese government. Back in the day, the Communist regime mandated all countries that wanted to establish ties with the PRC to not legally recognize Taiwan as a separate country, and to state that they consider the regime in Beijing as the one and only legitimate government of China, including that of Taiwan.

Taiwan is the world's 21st largest economy and has the 6th largest forex reserves around the world. Most importantly, Taiwan is the world's semiconductor capital. Without Taiwan, entire economies would crumble like houses of cards. For the most advanced semiconductors, Taiwan accounts for 92% of production. By 2020 itself, Taiwan was the unmatched leader of the global semiconductor industry with Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) alone accounting for more than 50% of the global market.

It takes no genius guess to figure out how a Chinese invasion of Taiwan would auger for the world's electronics industry, and for the global economy as a whole. With more than ½ of the world's semiconductor manufacturing capacity falling in Chinese hands, the national security of entire countries will come under threat as the CCP will exercise arbitrary discretion as to who is to be supplied with the microchips and who is to be deprived of them.

That is if TSMC continues manufacturing semiconductors, of course. Another possibility which is very real is that of the semiconductor giant ceasing operations in the event of a Chinese offensive against Taiwan, given how it relies on global supply chains to produce the microchips. Is the world ready to deal with Taiwan's absence from the global semiconductor supply chain? No, given how Taiwan is the undisputed hegemon on that front.

China poised to copy Putin's squeeze over Taiwan and cripple the world with key metals ban - Following Pelosi's visit to Taiwan tensions between Beijing and Washington soared to new heights. Chinese premier Xi Jinping responded by hosting military drills with live fire all around the island, sparking fears that China could soon try to fulfil its promise to take back to state "by force if necessary". But if a conflict were to break out between the US and China over Taiwan's sovereignty, experts have warned it could have far-reaching consequences on global manufacturing, effectively shutting down industries overnight.

Speaking to Express.co.uk, Jason Kaplan, founder of Commodities Analysis and Insight noted that China has a lot of influence over many minerals and commodities that are vital to the world economy.

He said: "Now one of the funny things is, China is fairly mineral light. It doesn't have huge resources, it has all of the processing. But for a couple of commodities, it is the biggest producer of molybdenum and other is rare earth elements. "Theoretically, in the past it has tried to use those to restrict the markets."

Rare earth elements are used in a number of different industries, like electric batteries, magnets, machinery, etc.

Molybdenum, on the other hand, is a crucial element used in stainless steel, as it adds corrosion resistance and high-temperature strength to the alloy, making it vital to a wide range of industries.

"There's two sides to the market - one is the state-run large enterprises, and the other is a whole lot of smaller local mines, which was a disorganized part of the sector.

"A few years ago they decided to clamp down on that, and as a result there was no molybdenum anywhere in the world.

"It sort of dried up overnight because the government decided to stop producing molybdenum from the disorganized sector. "That got a lot of people very concerned that if China ever changes the rules, the impact will be profound."

"And that's without China trying to do anything on purpose. If they wanted to try, it will be much more serious."

He noted that "virtually everything" will be impacted if China and the West become involved in a sanctions war over Taiwan.

If Xi were to use such tactics against the US, this would be a similar playbook to the way that Putin has been squeezing gas supplies flowing into the EU over the past year.

Kaplan noted that China produces 55% of global steel, while "Ukraine and Russia together make up 14% of global steel exports. "The prices of steel went through the roof virtually overnight when the conflict started.

"If 55% is taken out, construction, wind farm, your cars, everything will be affected. With China, we're not talking about price rise, we're talking about an inability to get materials."

Kaplan noted that if the price of steel doubles, the price of construction, wind turbines etc would double as well.

China has repeatedly made clear to the US that Taiwan is a red line and that Washington's support for "independence forces" could lead to war.

Comment – Should China elect to pursue such an embargo path, it will need to take care of its internal demographic challenges. It is reported that there are over 50 million apartments lying unoccupied in China (see following article) and with its real estate disaster looming ever-larger, this is an economic nuclear explosion waiting in the wings.

Similarly, pursuing such a global policy of economic belligerence will see Chinese manufacturing shut down – it will be unable to source strategic and vital minerals, and will have no market in which to sell its finished products to.

This will lead to large-scale layoffs in their “economic zones” - populated primarily by non-Han Chinese citizens, all of whom will be laid off and/or returned to their rural zones, from where they were drafted into China’s booming manufacturing areas as cheap labor in the first place.

They will need to manage how these folk and their families are catered for. The last thing China wants right now is another 1949 Revolution – and laying off this many citizens poses an immediate threat to their current political and demographic positions.

China will be on the clock for this policy to work. Just like Putin is waiting for winter to gauge EU reaction to shortages of gas, China will have to wait out the West for its policy to affect western economic and strategic realms, during which time they will need to grapple with their domestic demographic problems.

Aside from the above economic consequences to such actions, look for the US to immediately invoke its “First Island Chain” policy, rendering China immobile and commercially impotent.

Fifty million empty flats threaten to plunge China’s troubled property market further into crisis - The average vacancy rate in mainland China is 12.1%, according to BRI, meaning millions of empty units could flood the market. Now the property boom is over, the unoccupied homes are beginning to feel like a burden for their anxious owners. An amazing 69% of recent purchases are second or third homes.

Chinese President Xi Jinping’s mantra that homes should be for living in is falling on deaf ears, with tens of millions of apartments and houses standing empty across the country.

Soon-to-be-published research will show roughly 22 percent of China’s urban housing stock is unoccupied, according to Professor Gan Li, who runs the main nationwide study. That adds up to more than 50 million empty homes, he said.

The nightmare scenario for policy makers is that owners of unoccupied dwellings rush to sell if cracks start appearing in the property market, causing prices to spiral. The latest data, from a survey in 2017, also suggests Beijing's efforts to curb property speculation -- considered by leaders a key threat to financial and social stability -- are coming up short.

That's what you get when you rely upon mis-allocated investment to drive growth so that the social contract between populace and tyranny does not break down.

China's deflation tsunami breaks

Consumer price inflation climbs on food pressures

Food price inflation climbed again in China in July, surging to 6.3% y/y, from 2.9% in June. In turn, this was driven chiefly by pork – up 20.2% y/y from -6.0% – and vegetables, up 12.9% from 3.7%. If not for rising food prices, however, Chinese consumer price inflation would have fallen in July, with drops seen in services, core goods, and energy inflation. Services inflation fell to 0.7% y/y, from1.0%, core inflation fell to 0.8%, from 1.0%, and non-food inflation as a whole slowed sharply, to 1.9%, from 2.5%, with energy CPI slowing to 27.7%, on our estimate, from 38.4%.

The surprise, relative to expectations, comes from the weakness in core inflation. The reopening of China's economy should – in theory – have put some pressure on core, and particularly services, as consumers increased spending and enjoyed freedom. It wasn't expected it to last long, but a month's blip is very brief. Domestic demand looks soft.

Inflation has likely now peaked. Wholesale pork prices have retreated from recent highs, and base effects will also take some of the pressure off food inflation. Core inflation is unlikely to climb much from here, particularly as the fall in PPI feeds through to core goods.

Commodity price falls speed up PPI disinflation

The drop in China's PPI inflation in July was driven by a sharp fall in mining PPI, down to 18.8% y/y from 27.3%, and raw materials PPI, which fell to 11.4%, from 15.2%. Manufactured goods inflation also slowed, to 0.9% from 2.4%, with only consumer goods inflation unchanged, at 1.7%.

Energy is clearly a big driver of the moves. By industry, coal mining inflation – which was as high as 104% y/y in October 2021 – has been steadily falling, and is now 20.7% y/y, from 31.4% in June. Petroleum and natural gas extraction PPI inflation also dropped in July, to 43.9%, from 54.4%. The production and supply of electricity, heating, and gas also saw lower inflation rates in July. These slowing upstream costs should pass into downstream inflation within the next couple of months.

Global prices for energy and industrial commodities have been falling recently, and in the case of the latter, the y/y change was negative in July. Given the lag between international prices and Chinese PPI, further declines this year – with some noise – are baked in, and we think PPI inflation will turn negative early next year.

Impacts

U.S. calling Russia Terrorism Sponsor would be 'point of no return' - Moscow - Alexander Darchiev, a Russian Foreign Ministry official, warned the US on Friday that if it designates Russia as a state sponsor of terrorism it will have crossed a "point of no return."

The comments from Darchiev, the director of the Russian Foreign Ministry's North American Department, came in an interview with the Russian-state news agency TASS, and as some lawmakers from both sides of the aisle pressure the Biden administration to give Moscow such a label.

Senator Lindsey Graham, a South Carolina Republican, and Senator Dick Blumenthal, a Connecticut Democrat, told CNN last week that Biden or Congress should make such a designation amid Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Moscow warns of end to Russia-US relations if assets seized - Any possible seizure of Russian assets by the United States will completely destroy Moscow's bilateral relations with Washington, TASS quoted the head of the North American Department at the Russian foreign ministry as saying on Saturday.

Top Western officials, including European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell, have suggested seizing the frozen reserves to help fund the future reconstruction of Ukraine.

Consequences

"We warn the Americans of the detrimental consequences of such actions that will permanently damage bilateral relations, which is neither in their nor in our interests," Alexander Darchiev told TASS in an interview.

Putin

Putin is putting an end to the 'Russian World' - Putin justifies his aggression against Ukraine by the need to protect Russian speakers and rebuild “Russkiy Mir” – the Russian World.

In 2014, the Russian Federation annexed Crimea and declared its plan to take over “Novorossia” – New Russia – as it called Ukraine’s eastern and southern regions. Back then it didn’t succeed, and Putin had to content himself with slivers of land around Donetsk and Luhansk. But the goal was not abandoned, and now, eight years later, Russia is in a war.

But instead of promoting the Russian World, Putin’s actions will end Russia’s remaining cultural, linguistic and political influence in many ex-Soviet regions where it endures even now. Hitler, whom Putin emulates in so many ways, did the same for Germany: having set out to assert German domination in Europe, he instead destroyed German influence everywhere where it had been previously strong.

For at least a century before Hitler, there used to be a concept known as “Mitteleuropa,” the wider areas of Central Europe populated by various nationalities and ethnic groups whose intellectuals used German as the language of high culture. Central European Jews in particular strongly gravitated toward German culture. Jews in Prague spoke German and Franz Kafka wrote his works in German. Joseph Roth, a prominent Austrian novelist, was born in Brody, now Ukraine.

Theodor Herzl, born in a house next to the Great Synagogue in Budapest, was part of that same cultural phenomenon, and so was Sigmund Freud, a Moravian-born son of Galician emigrants. Elias Canetti, a Sephardi Jew from Bulgaria, was probably the last living Mitteleuropa writer when he was awarded the 1981 Nobel Prize for Literature.

After WWII German minorities were expelled from Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania and Yugoslavia. Germany is the leading economic and political power in the EU but has a disproportionately small cultural influence.

In the Baltics and the old Prussia, you will be hard-pressed to find anyone who speaks German. As part of the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, Latvia and Estonia were occupied by the USSR and the Baltic German population was “repatriated” to Hitler’s Reich. The Jews – those who had not been deported by Stalin as members of the “exploiter class” – were murdered when the Nazis invaded. Some 50,000 Latvian, German and Austrian Jews perished in the Riga Ghetto.

Instead, there is Russian. During the Soviet times, the government in Moscow built factories and brought workers in to work there. It also encouraged military retirees to settle in the Baltic – perhaps borrowing the idea from the Romans, who used to settle their veterans in newly conquered provinces.

As one moves through the countryside, older people, who went to Soviet schools where Russian was a requirement, generally respond in Russian – some reluctantly and others with a bit of nostalgic joy – not for Communism but for an opportunity to use a language they rarely spoke. But younger people have no desire to speak Russian even in the rare cases when they could, and showed off their excellent English instead, since many had worked in the UK.

Now that Putin has revealed his intentions to rebuild the Soviet Union, both old and young Baltic people want to have even less to do with Russia.

Big cities are another matter. Narva in eastern Estonia and Daugavpils in eastern Latvia are almost entirely Russian-speaking. So is Riga, and Tallinn is not far behind. Many of these Russians prefer to keep their Russian citizenship. A significant number watch Russian propaganda television and side with Putin in his aggression against Ukraine.

The Latvian and Estonian governments tried to deport their Russian minority once they became independent. But they wanted to become part of the EU, and such moves went against EU laws and the inclusive spirit of a united Europe.

Since February 2022, governments in Riga and Tallinn see Putin-sympathizers at home as a serious and immediate threat. Putin's agent cultivated the fifth column of collaborators in Ukraine who were supposed to open the door to Kyiv.

That didn't work but the same strategy may succeed with the Russian minority in Latvia and Estonia. Whether Brussels approves of this or not, Russians in those countries may one day soon share the fate of Germans in the Baltic and across Central Europe – with the corresponding end of Russian influence.

Why Putin fears Ukraine's special forces - Recent attacks on Russian airbases in Crimea and Belarus hit valuable military targets, destroying aircraft, including Su-30s and Su-24s, and damaging others. But the targets were also highly symbolic and psychologically impactful.

The videos that surfaced from the explosions at Crimea's Saki airbase showed Russian elites basking on the beaches of the Black Sea — beaches very close to the base. Their shock was visible as clouds of smoke and fire rose up behind them.

The Ukrainian Defense Ministry mocked Russians fleeing the beaches and warned them to stay away from Crimea, which they said is Ukrainian territory, in a video posted on Twitter.

While Kyiv hasn't officially confirmed or denied that Ukraine was responsible, one government official who spoke to the Washington Post on condition of anonymity said Ukraine's special forces were behind the attack.

This attack shows Ukraine taking the war to Russia in areas the Russians believed were safe, far behind the fighting.

The Saki airbase and the one in Belarus have been used to conduct air operations against Ukraine. The losses should significantly impact Moscow's ability to support ongoing operations, including protecting its troops against a Ukrainian counteroffensive to retake Kherson, in southern Ukraine.

Timing of the attack leads many analysts to believe that it was an attack by Ukrainian special forces that were able to infiltrate the base at night, place explosives at several points at the base, and then leave before they were discovered. The explosives were then command-detonated to coincide with the presence of large numbers of Russian beachgoers. This would cause panic and clog the roads, dealing Russians a psychological blow.

Ukrainian special forces received extensive training by both U.S. and UK counterparts after Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea, and again prior to the Russian invasion in February. Those Ukrainian personnel are now setting up resistance networks in occupied areas, as well as conducting attacks on Russian troops and positions.

Oleksiy Danilov, secretary of Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council, said, "If you ask me if there are partisans, I will answer: 'There are.' They are everywhere. We prepared in advance, and we have them," he said. "What they are doing is another matter. It depends on what tasks and when they will be received. And there is and will be resistance."

Could Belarus join Putin's troops in Ukraine?- 2 years ago, Sasha was organizing election rallies to try to oust the only post-Soviet president Belarus had ever known. The Minsk native is now fighting against Alexander Lukashenko dragging her country into Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"Belarusians just want to live peacefully, earn some money and develop their lives and families —this is all they want," she told Newsweek. "They don't want to go to war, they don't have these ambitions, this is why they don't want to be part of it."

While their relationship has ebbed and flowed, Putin has propped up Lukashenko—especially after the 2020 Belarusian election internationally condemned as rigged. It was followed by a brutal crackdown, with political prisoners still languishing in jails.

The leaders' ties highlight the ambiguity of the role Belarus plays in the war raging beyond the 674-mile border to its south. While not a full participant, Lukashenko has provided Putin's army with a staging ground for an offensive towards Kyiv, including areas for Russian missile launches and aircraft sorties.

"It's not only about Lukashenko now in Belarus, as they have Russian officers now in Belarus who are making orders."

"It's like a double occupation in Belarus now. We have Lukashenko who is actually beating people and there is a lot of repression," she said, "and we have Russians who are even much worse than Lukashenko."

Belarusian partisans sabotaged railway lines against important supply routes at the start of the invasion, when Russian missiles were fired from Belarus' territory toward Ukraine.

Information was also passed on to Ukrainian forces about bases from where the Russian missiles were fired, and this resistance would be repeated if Belarusian troops were forced to fight.

Ukraine hinted at Belarusian partisan involvement behind explosions on Wednesday at the Ziabrovka airfield, in the Gomel region, where Russian aircraft are reportedly stationed.

There is no anti-Ukrainian mood within the Belarusian army and if Lukashenko were to deploy them, he would be risking their defection, which would be seen as a failure because it would show that he could not control his own troops.

An increase in military activities along the border with Ukraine has raised alarm that Belarus could sooner or later play a more direct role in Putin's invasion. In May and June, Russia reportedly deployed Iskander, Pantsir and S-400 missile systems there.

Lukashenko has also reportedly decided to create a southern command and expand the country's armed forces from 65,000 to 80,000, hinting his troops might have to "fight for western Ukraine" so that it is "not chopped off by the West."

The General Staff of the Ukrainian Army said that Belarusian troops had been testing their readiness in the Brest and Gomel border regions.

However, senior officers from Belarus's special forces have warned in an open letter to Lukashenko that sending Belarusians to fight alongside Russians would be "pure suicide." Also, deploying troops who are not considered to be combat ready to a war Belarusians do not want risks further unrest for Lukashenko.

Konrad Muzyka, a defense analyst who focuses on Belarus and Russia, expected Lukashenko to recognize the independence of the separatist Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics at the start of the war and then send in his troops to Ukraine.

"But neither of these things happened," he told Newsweek, "I was very surprised by this. As the war has dragged on, my assessment has changed. Now I don't expect him to commit troops, if it hasn't happened already."

Russian soldiers 'didn't know we were invading Ukraine until we crossed the border' - A Russian paratrooper has revealed in a new memoir that his fellow soldiers had no idea they were invading Ukraine until they were already deployed on the battlefield.

Pavel Filatiev, 33, a former elite soldier who later quit on medical grounds, details how his unit was amongst the first to be stationed by the Ukrainian border in the days prior to the invasion.

Armed with nothing but a rusty machine gun and an ill-fitting uniform, Filatiev claims he had no idea he was being sent to invade Ukraine until he was awoken by the sound of gunfire in the back of an army truck crossing the border at 2am.

Filatiev asked: 'Are we firing at advancing Ukrainians? 'Where we were going and why wasn't clear. It was clear that a real war had begun. I found out [we had] orders to go to Kherson.'

In a series of devastating extracts published by Meduza, Filatiev outlines the major failings at the heart of Putin's military machine and reveals how poor equipment, low morale and inefficient leadership has internally crippled the Russian invading force.

When all of this started, I knew few people who believed in Nazis and, moreover, [who] wanted to fight against Ukraine, Filatiev wrote. 'We didn't have hatred and we didn't think of Ukrainians as enemies. 'Most of the army is dissatisfied with what is happening there."

'[They're] dissatisfied with the government and their commander, with Putin and his policies, [and] with the defence minister, who [has not served] in the army.

'We have all become hostages of many forces and we got carried away.

'We started a terrible war. A war in which cities are destroyed and which leads to the deaths of children, women, and the elderly.'

The start of the war quickly became chaotic, with his own commander not knowing what he was supposed to do.

He wrote: 'The command had no communications. The commander didn't understand what was happening.'

He says the army was woefully underprepared and tactically naive and blames a reliance on 'the ways of our grandfathers' as the reason his unit was wiped out.

'All of our training was only on paper, our technique was hopelessly outdated,' he said.

In battle he felt compromised by the army leadership, and says he never wanted to kill anyone.

Taiwan

US lawmakers in Taiwan on heels of Pelosi visit - Despite a show of force by China following US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's trip, more US lawmakers are visiting to "reaffirm the United States' support for Taiwan."

Twelve days after a controversial trip by United States House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to Taiwan, more US lawmakers were visiting the self-ruled island.

A five-member delegation, led by Senator Ed Markey, arrived in Taiwan on Sunday for a meeting with President Tsai Ing-wen and to attend a banquet hosted by Foreign Minister Joseph Wu. Markey, who leads the delegation, chairs the US Senate Foreign Relations East Asia, Pacific, and International Cybersecurity Subcommittee.

His office said the lawmakers would "reaffirm the United States' support for Taiwan," but would also "encourage stability and peace across the Taiwan Strait."

Containment

Stepping up arms production - Poland, Slovakia and Czechia have decided to launch a program that will expand productions of artillery systems, munitions, and other military equipment to Ukraine.

The news was announced yesterday at the Copenhagen Conference by Danish Defense Minister Morten Bodskov.

The countries of Central Eastern Europe smell Russian blood and they have been waiting for this moment for centuries.

The Netherlands and Norway have joined the Britain-based and led NATO training program for Ukrainian troops, becoming the latest participants in a growing effort to support Kyiv's war effort.

Norway has become the latest country to join the UK-led training programme for the Armed Forces of Ukraine, @Forsvarsdep announced this week.

They will join a growing international coalition training Ukrainian personnel in the UK.

The intricacies of F-35 operations over the frigid Alaskan frontier - With 54 F-35A Lightning II Joint Strike Fighters at a location that is closer to Tokyo than it is to Honolulu, and with easy access to a 77,000-square-mile training range, Eielson Air Force Base in Alaska is one of the U.S. military's most strategically important installations.

And, with ongoing concerns about threats from China and Russia, integrating the last of those F-35As into base operations, and the Red Flag Alaska 22-3 large force training exercise about to wrap up, it is also at the moment one of the busiest.

Together with the F-22 Raptors based at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson (JBER), near Anchorage, the arrival of the last of the F-35s at Eielson in April, Berkland noted, gives Alaska "the largest concentration of fifth-gen, combat-coded airpower in the world."

"Our priority now is to basically shift ourselves into full operational capability to be able to do agile combat employment (ACE) operations throughout the Pacific [area of operations] at austere locations," Berkland said. "So that for us that means that we need to be able to run hub-and-spoke operations with our full complement of fifth-gen combat airpower."

He is referring to being able to deploy the F-35s, which at Eielson are tasked with supporting U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM), "rapidly to the AOR," or area of responsibility, including austere locations with minimal logistics in place.

"We can really, in a single fighter sortie, range to just about any AOR in the Northern Hemisphere pretty easily," he said.

GeoPolitics

In shining armor against Putin regime - Why Lithuania has become the Kremlin's leading opponent in Europe and how Russian-speaking people are feeling there now.

The Lithuanian parliament voted in May to designate Russia as a terrorist state and blocked cargo transit via its territory to the Kaliningrad region in June. Then the European Union compelled Lithuania to unblock cargo deliveries by rail, which only showed yet again that Vilnius is much more radical toward Russia and its leader Vladimir Putin than Brussels, Berlin, or Paris.

This irreconcilable position also affects Russian-speaking residents of Lithuania, who are complaining about discrimination and the demolition of Soviet-era monuments. Lithuanian Internet users started proposing back in spring that a tank or a fighter aircraft be purchased for the Ukrainian Armed Forces. They then decided to raise donations for some “really serious weapon,” settled upon the famous Turkish combat drone Bayraktar.

They expected to raise 5 million euros in three weeks, but he managed to consolidate the whole sum in less than four days. However, Baykar Makina, the drone's manufacturer, declined to accept the money donated by Lithuanian citizens and simply gave one drone to Ukraine. After that, Tapinas transferred 1.5 million euros to the Lithuanian Defense Ministry to purchase missiles and bombs for the Bayraktar and spent the rest of the sum, in particular, on 110 anti-drone guns, 80 radars for them, and medical support for three hospitals in Cherkasy, where wounded Ukrainian soldiers are receiving medical treatment.

Lithuania is making up for the lack of military assistance by its moves in the ideological, media, and diplomatic fronts. For instance, the Lithuanian parliament voted in May 2022 to officially designate Russia as "a state sponsor and perpetrator of terrorism" and recognize Russia's actions in Ukraine as genocide. Besides, Lithuania has absorbed twice as many Ukrainian refugees as the neighboring Latvia or Estonia, and support for Ukraine is also more noticeable here, with blue-and-yellow flags and graffiti seen everywhere in the streets.

"Lithuania is supporting Ukraine morally and politically so much because it views it as an offspring of the Great Duchy of Lithuania. We think our faith and our civilization have had some influence on it," says historian Algimantas Kasparavicius. "Honestly, who [if not we] created Ukraine? After all, Ukrainians are very different from Russians. A Russian person – well, not all of them, but in general – has a vertical thinking, while a Ukrainian an anarchic thinking. The division occurred when Ukraine was part of the Duchy of Lithuania," says Matas Maldeikis, a member of the Lithuanian Seimas (parliament).

Asked about reasons for Lithuania's special attitude toward Russia, Kasparavicius refers to old times. "Some 15% to 20% of the one million books stored here deal with our rivalry with Russia," reasons the historian, with whom we meet at the National Library of Lithuania. "In fact, the question was about who would be the ruler of All Russia and who would gather up Russian lands. Ivan III, a grand-grandson of Vytautas, the grand duke of Lithuania, or Lithuanian dukes. At times, rivalry with Moscow stayed within the boundaries of routine geopolitical competition, like that between France and England, but sometimes it adopted the shape of mutual feud and hatred."

"Lithuanian-Russian rivalry is still not gone. No surprise that Lithuania, which feels itself part of the Western world, wants to take some revenge now. The same is happening with the United Kingdom, where policymakers said openly at the start of the Ukraine war that they would replay the 19th century history and kick [Russia's] ass. Both London and Vilnius are acting based on their historical experience now. The Lithuanians bear a certain cultural or even civilizational code, which cannot disappear just like that," Kasparavicius said.

Comment – Russia, as it existed pre-1991 was created by brute force and repression. Millions of peoples were forcefully moved from one area to another, entire civilizations were disrupted and millions more died. All in the name of the Russian state.

Resentment runs extremely deep in these peoples, albeit decades later, and now, with Russia’s miscalculation and ever-increasing desperation in its Ukrainian invasion, these sentiments are rising up in repudiation of Russian interests.

As Ukraine and Taiwan tensions rage, Pakistan envoy warns of another crisis - With the international community's eyes on Russia's ongoing war in Ukraine and a burgeoning crisis between China and Taiwan, Pakistan's envoy to the United States told Newsweek that high tensions across his country's disputed border with India risked sparking yet another crisis.

Friday marked the third anniversary of India's revocation of Articles 370 and 35A, a move that repealed the special, semi-autonomous status of the India-administered stretch of the disputed Kashmir region. New Delhi has argued the step was necessary to improve the situation of the embattled province beset by decades of insurgency, while Islamabad has rejected the move as an illegal change to a long-running feud with an international dimension.

And though the decision continued to stir frictions between two nuclear-armed South Asian rivals, Pakistani Ambassador Masood Khan said there has been a dangerous indifference to the issue on the part of the international community.

"Because of several developments in the international realm, for instance, Ukraine, the Indo-Pacific region," Khan said, "the United States or other permanent members of the U.N. Nation Security Council have not been able to devote much attention to Kashmir.

"So there's this continuing spell of inattention, which makes Kashmir a blind spot for the international community. This is perilous because, after all, Kashmir is located in a very sensitive region, and in this neighborhood, there are three nuclear powers, Pakistan, India and China."

And all three of these powers lay claim to part of the broader Kashmir region, a sprawling swath of Himalayan territory at the heart of several major wars since the end of the United Kingdom's colonization of the Indian subcontinent three-quarters of a century ago. The fate of Kashmir and its mostly Muslim population led by a Hindu ruler, sparked the first large-scale conflict between India and Pakistan, who would go on to fight three more wars and continued to clash in recent years, with an uneasy, rare ceasefire reached only in February of last year.

China, which has fostered close ties with Pakistan, lays claim to Kashmir's far east, where another disputed boundary exists between what India calls Ladakh and China calls Aksai Chin. The two powers fought a war over this region 50 years ago and clashes have resurfaced in recent years, most notably in a series of skirmishes that turned deadly in 2020, months after India incorporated Ladakh as a separate Union Territory alongside Kashmir, officially called Jammu and Kashmir.

On the third anniversary of the move, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying told reporters Friday that "China's position is clear and consistent" on Kashmir.

"The Kashmir issue is an issue left over from history between India and Pakistan," Hua said. "This is also the shared view of the international community. We stated back then that parties concerned need to exercise restraint and prudence. In particular, parties should avoid taking actions that unilaterally change the status quo or escalate tensions.

"We call on both India and Pakistan to peacefully resolve the dispute through dialogue and consultation."

Friday's anniversary drew some international attention elsewhere as well. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), which includes 56 U.N. members states as well as the U.N. observer State of Palestine, issued a statement condemning India's "illegal and unilateral actions taken in the Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir, which were followed by additional unlawful measures including illegal demographic changes."

"Such illegal actions can neither alter the disputed status of Jammu and Kashmir," the OIC added, "nor prejudice the legitimate right to self-determination of the Kashmiri people."

Unrest has also continued to brew within Kashmir itself, especially in India-administered Jammu and Kashmir. In addition to demonstrations Friday in which protesters opposed to India's special status repeal and subsequent crackdown clashed with security forces, insurgents have continued to conduct gun and grenade attacks.

New Delhi has accused Islamabad of sponsoring militant groups in the region, but Pakistan has denied the charge and accused India of committing human rights abuses against Jammu and Kashmir's 12 million people, most of whom are Muslims.