

Conflict Update # 366

February 24th, 2023

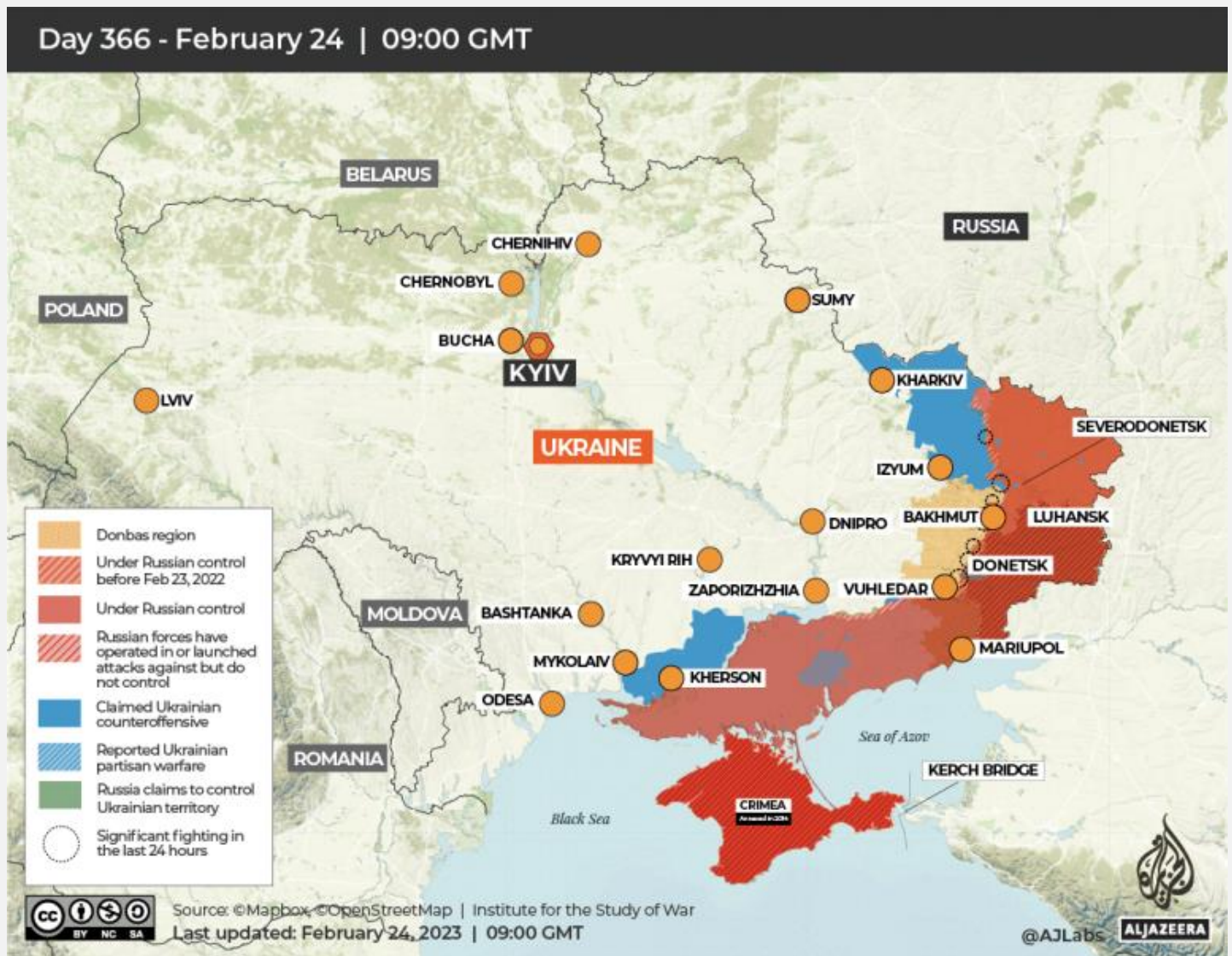
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Conflict Assessment

Russian losses – 146,820 (970) soldiers killed, 3,363 (+13) enemy tanks, 6,600 (+7) armored combat vehicles, 2,363 (+11) artillery systems, 474 (+3) MLRS systems, 244 (+0) air defense systems, 299 (+0) warplanes, 287 (+0) helicopters, 2,033 (+4) UAVs of the operational-tactical level, 873 (+0) cruise missiles, 18 (+0) warships/cutters, 5,224 (+9) trucks and tankers, 4 Iskander Missile Launchers (+0), 239 fuel bowsers (+0) and 229 (+1) units of equipment.

It is now being reported that 12,000 to 15,000 Ukrainian soldiers have died in the conflict to date.

Key Takeaways



'Intense' battles for control of Bakhmut continue - Al Jazeera's Charles Stratford, reporting from Brovary, near Kyiv, says there is "intense" fighting taking place around the "flashpoint" city of Bakhmut in eastern Ukraine.

"The fighting there has been going on for months but it has become particularly intense in the last few weeks," Stratford said.

"We know that Russian forces have taken control of villages to the south of Bakhmut and control the city's western sections," he added.

"They are trying to encircle Bakhmut and the estimates are that thousands of soldiers on both sides have been killed in the battle for the city."

Comment – Watching coverage last night of the conflict, Russian troops made small progress to the north of the city – if one can still call that because it is a shell of what it once was – whilst Ukrainian units pushed them back to the south.

Kyiv troops occupy the higher ground, giving them a tactical advantage with Kremlin units struggling through lower elevations and visible to defensive fire.

Further south, Ukraine pushed Russian units even further back from Vuhledar, where they suffered a tremendous defeat a week ago.

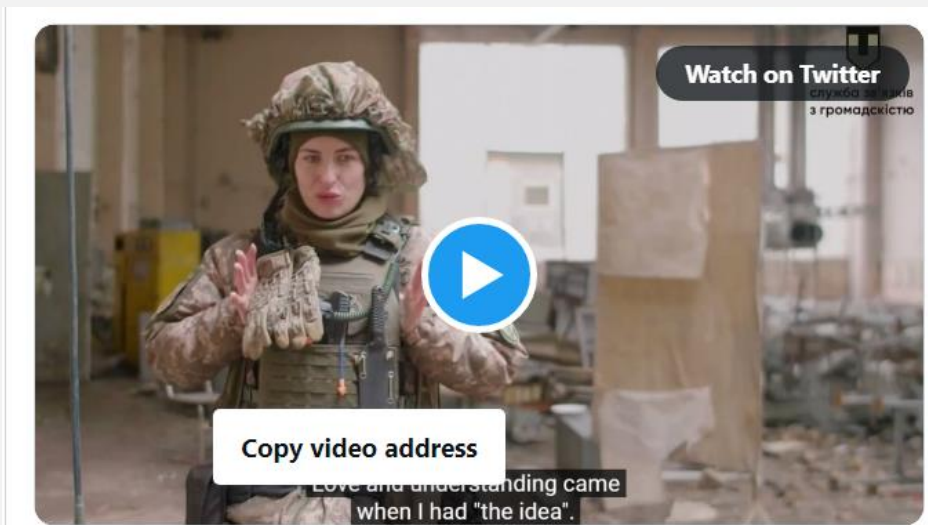
Further north around Kreminna, the gap is narrowing and we should see Ukrainian battlefield progress once their renewed offensive commences. At this point they are tactically "marking time" and preparing for their looming assault.

'Teeny-weeny' American weapons are beating Russians - The US supplied weapons of increasing cost and sophistication to Ukraine including M777 towed howitzers, Javelin top-attack anti-tank missiles, and eventually M1 Abrams main battle tanks and Patriot air defense systems.

But military aid need not always be exotic to have an impact. Starting before Russia's invasion of Ukraine one year ago and continued since, the US also provided modest quantities of low-tech infantry support weapons—M240 and M2 machine guns, 60-millimeter mortars, Mark 19 automatic grenade launchers, and M82 Barret sniper rifles.

These small arms have made their way to elite commando units, and also to some of Ukraine's most under-equipped troops, where they are making a difference as testified by Olha Bihar, known by "Witch" her callsign (Vyzdma).

Formerly a lawyer Ph.D., Witch now commands a mortar platoon in the 204th Territorial (TDF) Brigade. At least 57,000 women serve in Ukraine's armed forces, including at least 13,000 in roles near frontline combat.

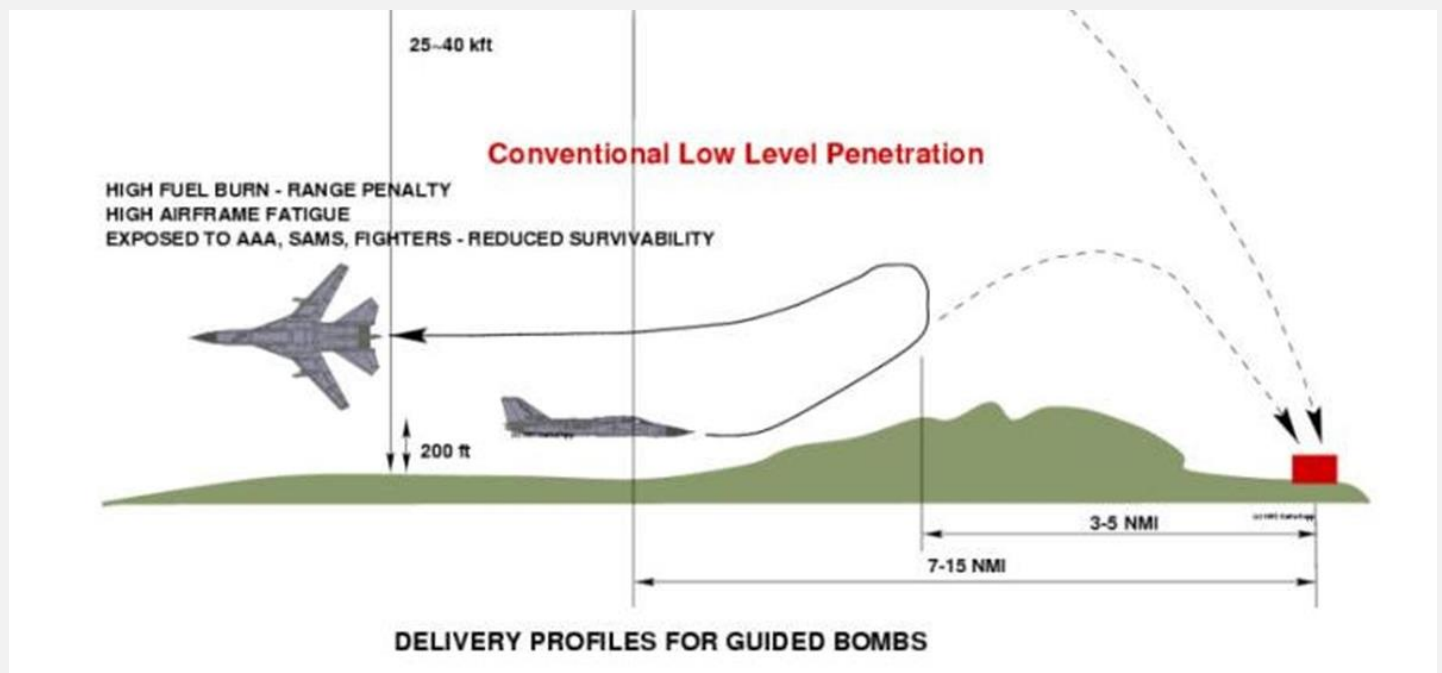


In a video, Witch recounts an intense battle between October 5-8, 2022 when her platoon defended Bakhmut's Siniat ALC asphalt mixing plant.

“The battle was brutal. We faced an enemy three times our number in close quarter gun fights—and Russian long-range artillery on top of that. The Muscovites [Russians] were able to penetrate a quarter of the territory we were defending...So, the orcs occupied part of the planet and we set out to provide fire support to our people pinned there. The fire support team had to work from a depression, without a line of sight.”

“As far as artillery, all we had was a small 60-millimeter mortar—firing range 1.5 kilometers [1 mile] at most. And the American Mark 19 grenade launcher, that saved our butts on multiple occasions, despite its equally short 2 kilometer [1.24 mile] firing range. But again, you don’t see what you’re shooting at, you fire blindly, guided from a drone.”

Ukrainian pilots could toss their new GPS-guided bombs 50 miles behind Russian lines - Flying low and fast toward the front line, a Ukrainian jet lugging a load of JDAM-ERs would pitch up and "toss" the bombs like a softball pitcher under-handing strikes.



The Pentagon’s provision of **Joint Direct Attack Munitions**, or JDAMs, result in the most important single upgrade for either the Ukrainian air force since Russia widened its war on Ukraine back in February.

That’s because the JDAM is accurate, whereas almost all the other munitions the Russian and Ukrainian air arms are hanging on their MiG and Sukhoi fighters and bombers ... aren’t.

At present, a section of two Ukrainian Sukhoi Su-25 attack jets or Mikoyan MiG-29 fighters might expend a combined four unguided rockets or bombs for a chance at destroying a single target.

With JDAMs, the same two Su-25s or MiG-29s carrying two 500-pound JDAMs apiece feasibly could destroy four targets in a single sortie—and potentially at lower risk.

JDAM isn’t really a bomb. It’s a guidance kit—one that fits on a variety of existing unguided munitions. The \$25,000 kits, manufactured by Boeing, add a GPS seeker and steerable fins to 500-, 1,000- and 2,000-pound bombs.

Could this be what was used earlier this week when Ukraine struck Mariupol assembly and supply points? A longer-range weapon was deployed and the JDAM may fit the bill.

AT4: Putin's tanks keep getting sent to armor hell thanks to this missile - The AT4 is a disposable – akin to the M72 LAW rocket in that regard – man-portable, shoulder-fired recoilless gun.

It's neither fish nor fowl; not considered a rocket launcher because the driven by a rocket motor, and not a recoilless rifle per se because the smoothbore. Vital stats, courtesy of 19FortyFive are as little over three feet long. It weighs around 15 can travel 820 feet in one second and can armor. The maximum effective range The projectiles can be dual-purpose penetration, and

The AT4 is meant for the use of the word discarded after a single firing.



explosive warhead isn't inside of the barrel is a follows: "The AT4 is a pounds. The round penetrate 16-inches of is about 1,000 feet. high-explosive anti-tank, delayed penetration, high-anti-structure for urban combat."

use by an individual soldier and, as indicated by "disposable" earlier in this article, is meant to be

By contrast, the m/48 Carl Gustaf, though of the same caliber and weight as the AT4, is intended for two-person operation, i.e., gunner and loader, which allows for a rate of fire of 6 rounds per minute, though the Gustaf can also be used by a single operator in a pinch, with a concurrent reduction in the rate of fire.

The multi-use Gustaf bears a unit cost of \$20,000 USD, whilst the single-use AT4 rings up a comparatively dirt-cheap unit cost of \$1,480 USD.

Medvedev says Russia ready to go up to Polish border in Ukraine victory - Former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev has said his country would be victorious in its Ukraine offensive and is ready to fight until the Polish border to counter "threats".

"Victory will be achieved," Medvedev said on Telegram, "This is why it is so important to reach all the goals of the special military operation. To push back the borders of the threats against our country as far as possible, even if this is to the borders of Poland."

Moscow issues warning over Moldova's breakaway region of Transnistria - Russia's foreign ministry has warned that any actions threatening its peacekeepers in Moldova's breakaway region of Transnistria will be seen as a direct attack on Russia.

"Any action that threatens their security will be considered under international law as an attack on the Russian Federation," the ministry said.

Russia's defence ministry accused Ukraine on Thursday of planning to invade Moldova's breakaway Transnistria region after a false flag operation, an assertion that was dismissed by the Moldovan government.

Comment – We have been writing about and cautioning on this issue since starting coverage of Russia's illegal invasion of it smaller neighbor. This is how they went after other pre-Soviet republics and states. The West needs to closely monitor Kremlin actions as Putin will create false flag incidents in order to justify his "peacekeepers" rampaging across the small, but strategically located, east European state.

Intelligence suggests China is considering sending drones and ammunition to Russia, sources familiar say - The US has intelligence that the Chinese government is considering providing Russia with drones and ammunition for use in the war in Ukraine, three sources familiar with the intelligence told CNN.

It does not appear that Beijing has made a final decision yet, the sources said, but negotiations between Russia and China about the price and scope of the equipment are ongoing.

Since invading Ukraine, Russia has repeatedly requested drones and ammunition from China, the sources familiar with the intelligence said, and Chinese leadership has been actively debating over the last several months whether or not to send the lethal aid, the sources added.

US intelligence officials have collected information in recent weeks, however, that suggests China is now leaning towards providing the equipment. The US and its allies last week began publicly warning about China's potential military support to Russia in an effort to deter Beijing from moving ahead with it and crossing a point of no return in terms of being seen as a pariah on the world stage, US officials said.

Comments, Updates, Developments and Reports

Polish PM Morawiecki visits Kyiv in show of support - Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki has travelled to Kyiv in a show of backing for Ukraine in its fight against Russia, according to a government spokesman.

"A year after the start of Russian hostilities, the Prime Minister @MorawieckiM went to Kyiv to give a clear and measurable signal of further support in defending Ukraine against Russia," Piotr Muller said in a post on Twitter.

Protests around the world for the first-year anniversary of Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine – Protests around the globe yesterday unfolded in support of Ukraine, with a bold Ukrainian flag painted on the tarmac outside the Russian Embassy in London (shown alongside), street gathering and chanting in ex-Soviet states, public displays in ASEAN countries and protests across the EU and US.

Aside from formal and universal governmental statements of condemnation of Russia and support for the victims of its war against its smaller neighbor, coupled with pledges of long-term and ongoing support for Ukraine proper, the cumulative effect of these statements and protests is that Ukrainian support has grown around the world, quite the opposite of what Putin planned.



Yesterday's UNGA vote showed an increase in the number of states voting in favor of demanding a Russian withdrawal compared to the previous UN vote.

Lavrov, Russian FM, has been rushing around the globe in trying to rally support for the Russian cause, but focused on captive pro-Russia orbital nations in this regard. There are no new or substantive alignments in their favor.

As the conflict rages into its second year, expect to see positions hardening. Although China is expressing support for Russia and now increased interaction with Belarus, whether they start providing lethal support for the Kremlin remains to be seen.

Coming out of the COVID-19 period, their economy is fragile. Any "manufactured" global recession, seeing even a few GDP percentage points drop, will result in a message of social catastrophe reverberating around their financial planning corridors.

China has its strengths, but it needs to ensure it doesn't overplay its role and station in life.

Putin's decision has 'ripped apart families': Blinken - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has denounced Russia's invasion of Ukraine on the anniversary of Moscow's offensive.

"President [Vladimir] Putin's decision has ripped apart families, forced millions from their communities, destroyed homes, schools, hospitals, and other civilian infrastructure, exacerbated a global food crisis, destabilized energy markets, and undermined international peace and security," Blinken said in a statement.

"This war has shredded Russia's international reputation, left Russia weakened and isolated, and decimated its economy. This war is an attempt to seize territory from Ukraine and thwart its independent, democratic trajectory," he added.

Blinken also praised Ukraine's "fight" and its people's "resolve and resilience", saying they had "emerged as an inspiration to the world, showing they will not be cowed".

"The United States stands strongly with Ukraine as it defends itself, and we will continue to do so until Ukraine's sovereignty is respected and the people of Ukraine can shape their chosen, democratic future in freedom and peace," he said.

Chinese interest in the war 'not bad': Zelenskyy - Ukraine's president has said China's interest in the war is "not bad" after Beijing called for a comprehensive ceasefire as part of a 12-point plan for dealing with the conflict.

"China has shown its thoughts. I believe that the fact that China started talking about Ukraine is not bad," Zelenskyy said at a news conference on the anniversary of the Russian invasion.

"But the question is what follows the words. The question is in the steps and where they will lead to."

He added there were points in the Chinese proposals that he agreed with "and there are those that we don't."

"But it's something," he said.

German gov't spokesperson says China's ceasefire plan missing important elements - A spokesperson for Germany's government has cautiously welcomed the 12-point plan presented by China for a ceasefire in Ukraine but noted important elements, such as Russian troops' withdrawal, were missing from the proposal.

"It is important that China now discusses these ideas directly with Ukraine, as this is the only way to find a balanced solution that takes Ukraine's legitimate interests into account," the spokesperson said.

Comment – It appears western states and Ukraine would dearly like to see China join in a common call to Russia to withdraw from Ukraine lands it has occupied since the 2014 and 2022 Russian invasions, and further adhere to the UN Demand as issued this week.

They may see a fissure of hope – at least as regards China – in exerting pressure on the Kremlin to withdraw. What is still needed though is increased economic and geopolitical pressure, still some ways off unfortunately. The Chinese economy is fragile and we should look to that element for surgical pressure pointing.

Their BRI initiative is currently showing signs of fracture, and the West should look to exploit any economic precipices, success thereof leading to diluting the bi-polar base China and Russia so fervently desire.

Blinken warns UN Security Council over calls for unconditional ceasefire in Ukraine - The UN Security Council should not be fooled by calls for a temporary or unconditional ceasefire in Ukraine and should not fall into the "false equivalency" of calling on both sides to stop fighting, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has said.

Russia will use any pause in fighting to consolidate control of territory and replenish its forces, Blinken said after China called for a ceasefire as part of a position paper on the war. “No member of this council should call for peace while supporting Russia’s war on Ukraine and on the UN Charter,” Blinken said.

Ukraine’s Kuleba says any peace proposals must align with UN demands - Ukraine’s foreign minister has told the UN Security Council that any new peace proposals for an end to the war should be aligned with the demands made in a recent UN General Assembly resolution.

“Ukraine will resist as it has done so far, and Ukraine will win. Putin is going to lose much sooner than he thinks,” Dmytro Kuleba told the 15-member Security Council.

The UN General Assembly passed a resolution late on Thursday calling for the withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukraine and a halt to fighting in the country.

NATO, EU pour cold water on Chinese ceasefire proposal – NATO’s Jens Stoltenberg has poured cold water on a Chinese proposal for a ceasefire in Ukraine, saying Beijing was not well-placed to negotiate an end to the war.

“China doesn’t have much credibility because they have not condemned the illegal invasion of Ukraine,” he said to reporters in Tallinn, adding Beijing had signed an agreement with Putin only days before the invasion.

European Commission President von der Leyen echoed Stoltenberg’s sentiments, saying China had not shared a peace plan but some principles.

“You have to see them against a specific backdrop, and that is the backdrop that China has already taken sides by signing, for example, an unlimited friendship right before the invasion,” she said.

“So we will look at the principles, of course, but we will look at them against the backdrop that China has taken sides.”

Taiwan sees China taking lessons from Russia-Ukraine war - China’s military is learning from Russia’s invasion of Ukraine that any attack on Taiwan would have to be swift to succeed, but the Taiwan Strait would make that challenging, the island’s defence minister has said.

“The Russia-Ukraine war has brought great lessons for them – they will definitely seek speed,” Taiwan Defence Minister Chiu Kuo-cheng told reporters in Taipei, referring to China’s military.

“They would still have to overcome this,” Chiu said. “It wouldn’t be as fast as a week or two.”

He added, “I’ve said it before – as soon as the guns sound, we will keep going to the end. But we absolutely will not provoke.”

Comment – I do not see this happening. The Taiwan Strait is 97 nautical miles wide at its narrowest point.

The only possible large-scale landing area for any invading force is the south north west of the island where sea travel is fraught with shallow draft sea lanes and passageways. The rest of the island is comprised of steep cliffs facing the ocean. So any “need for speed” to engage in a successful invasion of the island formerly called Formosa, will reduce to “slowly as we go,” ensuring it will not happen.

For any hope of success, China will need to dispatch 600,000 combatants, in the initial assault wave, transshipping them mid-sea to smaller landing craft – all the while providing air cover – an impossibility. Sitting ducks all the while.

Beijing does not presently possess a maritime fleet capable of moving and landing such a force. The US watches this factor very closely and have not seen to date any semblance of landing craft or support flotilla formation.

Should they however succeed, they then have to police and contain the Taiwanese, an absolutely enormous and in my opinion impossible task, requiring millions of Chinese administrators and enforcement troops to ensure subservience of the indigenous population.

Taiwanese will take to the deep hills, of which Taiwan has thousands, from where they will conduct a guerilla campaign, severely disrupting Chinese intensions and plans, never mind successful subjugation of some 24 million people.

Taiwanese chip manufacture FABs are largely located in and around the south west of the island, adjacent to invasion landing zones, and will certainly and surely see destruction in the event of any major Chinese incursion.

Atop all this, there is the guaranteed western military reaction following on the heels after any Chinese invasion. The US will overnight activate its "First Island Channel" policy whereby every Chinese ocean port is shut down, something Washington can literally do overnight.

Nothing will move into or out of China by sea in the area from South Korea through the Malacca Strait.

China will be isolated with catastrophic results to its GDP with social upheaval consequently following. China is simply not geared to catering and accommodating for such a disastrous internal - and global - outcome.

And finally, Taiwan is not Ukraine. It has a formidable and totally-prepared military force, armed with the very latest NATO and US equipment, including advanced missile technology, coupled with blue-water and green-water fleets.

It also regularly conducts intense and military drills and training campaigns with western Allies.

Ukraine is surrounded in the west, east and north by land whereas Taiwan is completely surrounded by sea, a totally different "kettle of fish," forgive the pun.

Taiwan is the polar opposite of Ukraine when it comes to preparation, armaments, technology and western support.

There is no need for lobbying or political approach - it is already there, in place and waiting.

So yes, China will have learnt from the Russian failed escapade into Ukraine, but so will the US, NATO and other global powers.

That doesn't say China will forgo attempting other avenues of aggression, but all of which lead back to their vulnerability – their economic dependence on the West – the EU and US account for some 68% of all Chinese exports – and their fragile social makeup.

And in the far corner, may I introduce India and the 'Stans.

Ukrainian nationalism

In the bastion of Ukrainian nationalism in the far west of the country, Russian culture and language is not welcome.

Yet it is thanks to Stalin, who in 1945 extended newly Sovietized western Ukraine farther west, that Mukachevo is even in Ukraine. And so non-Russian western Ukraine was joined to its other more Russian half in the east, which had been Soviet in 1920, and for centuries before that had been part of the tsarist Russian empire. It was a recipe for conflict between two different cultures and religions: Roman Catholic and Russian Orthodox.

If the 1,300 statues of Lenin had not been removed since Ukrainian independence in 1991, the anonymous red paint dauber who struck in Ternopil, 300 km. northeast of Mukachevo, a few days later, would have bloodied Lenin. But his act focused on Pushkin, the most prominent Russian at hand.

Two days after Pushkin's removal from Mukachevo, the Ternopil municipality removed its own Pushkin. Ternopil, like Mukachevo, was a city with a mixed history, a long one under Austria and Poland, and a short one under Soviet Russia.

Unlike Mukachevo, Ternopil's Mayor Serhi Nadal spoke out and justified the demolition of Pushkin, saying: "Everything Russian must be dismantled."

Since then, in dozens of cities, towns and villages across the country, even in central Ukraine, Pushkin statues and busts have been toppled from their pedestals, often smashed with sledgehammers. In far west Pushkino, local councilors have been debating what to rename their village.

What of the Russian language?

Ostensibly, Putin claimed to invade Ukraine in the first place to protect Russian speakers – Russia's brothers, who, he maintained, were under threat of cultural genocide by Banderistas.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, who likened banning Russian in Ukraine to banning English in Ireland or French in Belgium, unconsciously admitted that Ukraine is as separate a country from Russia as Belgium is from France. Although Russian has not been banned, it is true that restrictions have steadily increased.

Russian is the mother tongue of just 2-3% of the population in the Carpathian region around Mukachevo in the Ternopil region, rising to 25% in Kyiv; 42% in Odesa; 65% in Donbas; and 77% in Crimea, according to the 2001 Ukrainian census.

Comment – Stalin forcefully removed the Cossacks from Crimea to other locations throughout Russia, transferring Russian-speaking Slavs to the peninsula. So the high percentage of Russian-speaking people in Crimea is a misnomer, it is the direct outcome of Stalinist genocide in areas where he ruled.

Comment – Genocide against the Cossacks was not an isolated policy of the Russian government.

Yesterday marked 79 years since their deportation of Chechens and Ingushes to Kazakhstan and Central Asia, the picture to the right showing the inhumane method of deporting indigenous peoples from their historical homelands.



This was a period in Russian history during which almost 500,000 people were deported from Chechnya and Ingushetia to Kazakhstan and Central Asia, from February 23 to March 9, 1944. Источник: <https://eng.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/62179/> © Кавказский Узел.

This was no different to what the Nazi's perpetrated upon Jewish people, twenty-odd years earlier in the 30's and 40's. There are no official events dated for this anniversary in Chechnya.

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It is also true that Russian is the mother tongue of many ethnic Ukrainians and Ukrainians of mixed heritage who do not want Putin's brotherly solicitude. In Odesa, although 42% claim to be primarily Russian speakers, 84% want Ukraine to be independent, while even in the Donbas 54% of the population wanted independence in what might be the closest Donbas will ever get to a fair referendum. [The poll was taken in April 2014 by the Kiev International Institute of Sociology, two months after the seizure of Crimea.]

In 2019, just before Zelensky assumed the presidency, Ukrainian was established as the country's official language. Ukrainian-language TV programming had increased steadily since independence from 30% to 75%, and music on the radio had to be 35% Ukrainian. Interpersonal communication in public institutions could only be in Ukrainian.

In 2022, the law demanded all Ukraine-registered media outlets also publish in Ukrainian. That includes Russian (if anything written first in Russian is still approved for publication). But the law does not ban Russian between private individuals. About 30% of Ukrainians speak Russian as their only tongue.

Nevertheless, the legal tolerance of Russian is not the point. The invasion has eliminated Russian far more effectively than any law could. While it is illegal to ask for stamps in the post office in Russian, the story of three Russian-speaking women friends in Kyiv who parted company a month after the invasion embodies a bitter truth.

One fled to Turkey, one to the US, and one remained in Kyiv. Like many Kievans, they had always spoken Russian together, though they had learned some Ukrainian since the constitution in 1996 declared, "The state language of Ukraine is the Ukrainian language." Now, corresponding from a distance by phone and mail, they speak and write only in Ukrainian because Russian just seems unpatriotic.

Sanctions

Canada imposes new Russia sanctions, pledges battle tanks to Ukraine - Canada is imposing new Russia-related sanctions and sending four more Leopard 2 battle tanks to Ukraine, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said, marking the first anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on Friday.

Russia's ambassador to Canada Stepanov said sanctions by Canada and the West were "meaningless." TASS reported.

"Our citizens who are on the list look at such measures with a smile," Stepanov was quoted as saying. "This is a sign of the helplessness of the anti-Russian camp, which hates Russia, but understands that we cannot be defeated."

G7 says it is taking action against countries supporting 'Russia's war' - G7 is taking actions against third-country actors "materially supporting Russia's war in Ukraine," the bloc has said in a statement, reaffirming its support for Ukraine.

"We call on third-countries or other international actors who seek to evade or undermine our measures to cease providing material support to Russia's war, or face severe costs," the G7 said.

"To deter this activity around the world, we are taking actions against third-country actors materially supporting Russia's war in Ukraine."

US to impose 200% tariff on aluminum from Russia: White House - The United States will impose a 200 percent tariff on aluminum and derivatives produced in Russia effective from March 10, the White House has said.

Washington will also apply a 200 percent tariff on aluminum imports with any amount of primary aluminum smelted or cast in Russia, starting on April 10, it added.

Russian aluminum is produced by Rusal, which accounts for about 6 percent of global supplies. Supplies to the US accounted for 7 percent of Rusal's revenue in the first half of 2022.

Russian aluminum accounts for only a small portion of total US supplies.

UK issues export bans on every item used by Russia in war - The United Kingdom has issued more sanctions against Russia, including export bans on every item it has used on the battlefield.

The Foreign Office said the internationally coordinated sanctions and trade measures would target aircraft parts, radio equipment and electronic components.

It will also target more executives, including those at the nuclear power plant Rosatom and defence groups.

What US sanctions against China could look like - In the event China does supply lethal aid to Moscow, the US may start with sanctioning Chinese companies in the military industrial complex. It could expand that list if the support continues.

Further action could see secondary penalties placed on China, which would sanction other countries and entities outside of China who do business with Beijing.

A more drastic possibility would be the US imposing export controls similar to an October rule that restricted semiconductor chips made with American tools from being sent to China. Should those rules extend to more products China needs to source from abroad, including parts in its aviation sector, China's economy could be seriously damaged.

Putin and Xi Jinping have long been allies, and both leaders announced a "no limits" partnership shortly before Russia invaded Ukraine last year.

Trade has boomed between them, soaring to record levels last year. And China, Russia and South Africa are holding joint military drills this weekend. (**Comment** – Centered nearly wholly on energy exports to Beijing at huge discounts).

The US and China are already competitors in virtually every sector. Washington has sanctioned several Chinese companies, including tech company Huawei, over national security concerns. Other entities have been sanctioned for alleged human rights abuses in the region of Xinjiang and the self-governing city of Hong Kong.

The US has also sanctioned Chinese companies allegedly supporting Russia's war in Ukraine, including Spacety China, a satellite manufacturer accused of providing satellite imagery to Moscow.

Comment – The US and EU could also introduce punitive tariffs on consumer goods that do not affect strategic or multi-lateral agreements or unaligned products. This would place significant stress on Chinese economic manufacturing zones, leading to large-scale layoffs and redundancies, something Beijing fears most.

As mentioned in numerous earlier Updates, China's "Achilles Heel" is undoubtedly its economy which, in and of itself, may be more effective than any military option.

Hurt their economy, watch social unrest unfold and envelop the nation, see revenues dwindle if not drop precipitously, whilst all the while never needing to aim a missile.

Containment

US announces new \$2bn military aid for Ukraine, Russia sanctions - The United States has announced a new \$2bn package of long-term security assistance for Ukraine on the first anniversary of Russia's invasion.

The aid will include more rounds of ammunition and a variety of small, high-tech drones, the Pentagon said.

The package will not include the F-16 fighter jets that Ukraine has repeatedly requested.

Washington also announced new sanctions against Russia and its allies, new export controls and tariffs aimed at undermining Moscow's ability to wage war.

The sanctions are aimed at targets in Russia and "third-country actors" across Europe, Asia and the Middle East that are supporting Russia's war effort, the White House said in a fact sheet.

UK revives proposal to get Soviet-era fighters to Ukraine - Defense Secretary Ben Wallace says UK could 'backfill' for eastern European allies if they send older planes to Ukraine.

The UK is pushing for the West to supply modern fighter jets to eastern European allies so that they can donate their own Soviet-era planes to Ukraine.

British Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said Friday this would allow Ukraine to receive more MiG 29 or Su-24 fighters to defend against Russian aggression.

But, speaking on Sky News, he stressed the U.K. would not be sending its own Typhoon jets "in the short-term" to Ukraine, amid concerns Britain does not have many to spare.

Poland says Ukraine to get fighter jets sooner or later - It's only a matter of time before Western nations decide to send fighter jets to Ukraine, according to Poland's Permanent Representative to NATO Tomasz Szatkowski.

China warns against use of nuclear weapons - China has insisted that nuclear weapons must not be used in the Russia-Ukraine war.

In its 12-point paper on a "political settlement" of the crisis, China said "nuclear weapons must not be used and nuclear wars must not be fought." It added that the threat or use of nuclear weapons should also be opposed.

China also highlighted the need to protect civilians, saying that "parties to the conflict should strictly abide by international humanitarian law" and "avoid attacking civilians or civilian facilities."

Comment – This is not the first occasion China has issued this warning, quite clearly directed at Moscow, with Ukraine having no nuclear weapons after 1991. Any Kremlin deployment of such weapons will certainly be a gamechanger from a Chinese perspective.

Poland's Leopard tanks arrive on anniversary - Poland says it has delivered four Leopard 2s to Ukraine, the first such battle tanks to be supplied by Kyiv's Western allies.

Germany says it will deliver a further four tanks to Ukraine, taking its overall commitment to 18 units, while Sweden announces plan to deliver 10 tanks from its own stocks.

Sweden has announced that it would deliver about 10 Leopard 2 tanks and anti-air systems to Ukraine, the latest Western country to pledge heavier weapons.

Speaking at a news conference to mark the anniversary of the war in Ukraine, Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson and defence minister Pal Jonson said the Nordic country would send "around" 10 of Sweden's Leopard 2A5 tanks as well as the anti-air missile systems IRIS-T and HAWK to Ukraine.

Canada announces more than \$32m in support for Ukraine - Canada has said it will provide Ukraine with more than \$32m in support to further strengthen its security.

The aid includes \$7.5m for demining efforts and more than \$12m to counter chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear threats, Canada's ministry of foreign affairs said in a statement.

Microsoft tops the list of largest private donors to Ukraine with \$430 million—but Google also made the cut - Some of the largest private donations in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine a year ago have come from American technology companies and European foundations or companies with a social mission. But millions of individuals have also given directly to nonprofits or humanitarian agencies with some of their donations amplified by employer or donor matches.

Another measure of support of Ukraine and Ukrainians can be seen in the astronomical growth of US-based nonprofits like Nova Ukraine and Razom for Ukraine, both of which were founded in 2014 after Russia first invaded Crimea. They went from receiving hundreds of thousands of dollars in contributions annually to each raising more than \$70 million in cash and in-kind donations since February 2022.

Here are some of the largest publicly-known private donations to support Ukraine and Ukrainians in the past year.

- *Microsoft*: \$430 million donation in cash and services
- *Nationale Postcode Loterij*: 155.2 million euros (\$165.9 million) donation
- *Epic Games*: \$144 million donation
- *Dmitry Muratov*: \$103.5 million donation
- *Epam Systems*: \$100 million commitment
- *Breakthrough Prize Foundation*: \$100 million commitment
- *Akelius Foundation*: 496 million Swedish krona (\$47 million) donation
- *The Conference On Jewish Material Claims Against Germany*: \$47 million donation
- *Google.Org*: \$45 million committed in cash and services.
- *Nippon Foundation*: 5 billion yen (\$37 million) commitment

Putin & Russia

Putin will be angry: Ukraine is getting more weapons to fight Russia - President Joe Biden's surprise visit to Ukraine earlier in the week brought additional security aid for the Ukrainian military.

Worth almost half a billion, the latest package of security aid is tailored to help the Ukrainian forces hold the ongoing Russian offensive.

The Russian assault isn't going well, with Ukrainian forces absorbing the heaviest blows without any significant territorial losses—they have been suffering casualties, though. But fending off tens of thousands of Russian troops is expensive in terms of ammunition. The latest security aid package is aimed specifically at that.

This - the 32nd US package of security aid to Ukraine includes the following:

- Additional ammunition for High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS);
- Additional 155mm artillery rounds;
- Additional 120mm mortar rounds;
- Four air surveillance radars;
- Additional Javelin anti-armor systems;
- Approximately 2,000 anti-armor rockets;
- Four Bradley Infantry Fire Support Team vehicles;
- Two tactical vehicles to recover equipment;
- Claymore anti-personnel munitions;
- Demolition munitions;
- Night vision devices;
- Tactical secure communications systems;
- Medical supplies;
- Spare parts and other field equipment.

This package is coming from a Presidential Drawdown Authority (PDA), meaning that the weapon systems and ammunition is coming out from the stocks of the Department of Defense.

The other major type of security aid to Ukraine is coming from the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative (USAI), which provides the funds to purchase new weapon systems from the industry for Ukraine.

This type of aid provides brand-new weapon systems to Ukraine, but it is also much slower than drawdowns from the Pentagon's arsenal.

Small wonder then that Putin will be outraged as per Stavros Atlamazoglou in "1945" yesterday.

Putin announces modernization of Russian army - Putin has announced a modernization of the Russian army shortly before the first anniversary of the war he ordered against Ukraine.

"The level of equipment of Russia's nuclear deterrent forces with the latest systems is now 91.3%," Putin said in his State of the Nation address broadcast on Russian state television on Tuesday. "Now - taking into account our accumulated experience - we must achieve such a high level of quality in all parts of the armed forces," he added.

Comment – Not the first time he has called for modernization, the immediate previous occasion being post-2014 when he allocated billions of dollars for the same purpose. – a large chunk of which went straight into his and other oligarch and senior Russian military pockets buying yachts and the like.

Ukrainian prosecutor says tens of thousands of Russian war crimes recorded - Ukraine's top war crimes prosecutor says officials have recorded more than 69,000 cases of Russian violations of the laws of war since it launched its invasion a year ago.

"We are trying to see ... what we should focus on first. For example, where there is attacks on infrastructure, where we have civilians being killed," Yuriy Belousov told Al Jazeera.

"We are trying to structure investigations to use modern technologies of gathering evidence ... using solutions to give us a chance to work with this workload," he added.

Asked if he believes justice will be served, Belousov said he was "confident" it would.

"It's not just a matter of Ukraine ... The whole world supports us. We have support from more than 20 countries that have started their own investigations," he said.

"We have support from International Criminal Court, and all our forces have been focused on gathering evidence. That's why we are sure that we will prosecute. It will take time. Some will be prosecuted in our national courts, some will be prosecuted in other countries."

Russian academic says there is strong support for Putin over offensive - Olga Krasnyak, an associate professor at the Higher School of Economics in Moscow, says there is strong support among Russians for what the Kremlin calls its "special military operation" in Ukraine.

"Even some people who had certain reasons not to support this conflict, because Ukraine is our brotherly nation, [now] understand that it is necessary," Krasnyak told Al Jazeera from the Russian capital.

"We see that Western countries have turned their back on Russia and started to oppose Russia," she added.

"It is like a besieged state here in Russia, so in this situation we support the President [Vladimir Putin]."

"This is not a conflict with Ukraine or Ukrainian people. It is a conflict with Western countries that is now becoming deeper and larger because it is about a new world order and a new hierarchy of countries."

Comment – Precisely what Putin is waiting for. He has restricted conventional and unbiased Russian coverage of the war, deviation from which can see up to 15 years incarceration, instead installing state-owned and controlled messaging, in order to provide the Kremlin point and rationale of war to the Russian people.

Should he swing Russian popular opinion into thinking and believing that this is an East/West thing, that Moscow and Putin in particular is rallying the Russian Federation in defense against this “capitalist aggression,” and that young soldiers dying for the Russian cause, then literally he has a blank Russian cheque to use.

But as always, when the body bags roll in, challenges follow.

Russia may send fighter jets to Iran - The White House has said it believed Moscow might provide Iran with fighter jets and other military equipment in exchange for Iran’s expanded support for Russia’s war in Ukraine, according to White House national security spokesperson John Kirby.

Kirby told reporters the United States had information that Iran had shipped artillery and tank rounds to Russia in November, and Russia was offering “unprecedented defence cooperation” in return, including on missiles, electronics and fighter jets.

He said Iran was also seeking to buy attack helicopters, radars and combat trainer aircraft, he said.

Putin says Russia does not attack civilian targets, tell it to these moms.



Russia losing fiscal stability very quickly, says economist - Russian economist Nick Korzhenevsky, from statistical service SberIndex, said Russian expenditures have “ballooned” since the start of war.

“The direct expenditure it now commits to the war is around \$100bn a year,” he told AJ, speaking from Warsaw. “That’s what they have to spend. And then there’s also economic losses, I would say that’s another \$20-30bn a year.”

“The official expenditure forecast for this year is \$400bn. The government receipts will be around \$350bn. But what’s most interesting is that just before the war started the plans for expenditures for this year were officially only \$300bn.”

Korzhenevsky said that the effects of sanctions on Russia will be felt in the medium and long term.

“Last year was better than many expected in a sense because the government expenditure, which is directly part of the GDP, was so high,” he said. “Oil and gas sanctions only really kicked in the fourth quarter, so for nine months out of last year the revenues were OK and the industry was doing all right.”