

Conflict Update # 190

September 22nd, 2022

Back issues at www.accgroupco.com

Conflict Assessment

Russian losses – 55,510 (+400) soldiers killed, 2,236 (+9) enemy tanks, 4,776 (+28) armored combat vehicles, 1,341 (+1) artillery systems, 318 (+0) MLRS systems, 169 (+1) air defense systems, 253 (+1) warplanes, 218 (+1) helicopters, 941 (+9) UAVs of the operational-tactical level, 240 (+2) cruise missiles, 15 (+0) warships/cutters, 3,630 (+20) trucks and tankers, 4 Iskander Missile Launchers (+0), 76 fuel bowsers (+0) and 125 (+0) units of specialized equipment.

Key takeaways

Russia's military divided as Putin struggles to deal with Ukraine's counteroffensive, US sources say - Russia's military is divided over how best to counter Ukraine's unexpected battlefield advances this month, according to multiple sources familiar with US intelligence, as Moscow finds itself on the defensive in both the east and the south.

Putin is himself giving directions directly to generals in the field, two sources familiar with US and western intelligence said– a highly unusual management tactic in a modern military that these sources said hints at the dysfunctional command structure that has plagued Russia's war from the beginning.

Intelligence intercepts have captured Russian officers arguing among themselves and complaining to friends and relatives back home about decision-making from Moscow, one of these sources told CNN.

And there are significant disagreements on strategy with military leaders struggling to agree on where to focus their efforts to shore up defensive lines, multiple sources familiar with US intelligence said.

The Russian Ministry of Defense has claimed that it is redeploying forces toward Kharkiv in the northeast – where Ukraine has made the most dramatic gains – but US and western sources say the bulk of Russian troops still remain in the south, where Ukraine has also mounted offensive operations around Kherson.

Comment 1 History repeating itself – Czar Nicholas II similarly took command on the Russian Imperial Army in 1915, with disastrous results.

By late 1915 the Czar had seen Russian failures in the war as a personal insult and felt the only way the war could be turned around would be his taking direct command of the military. There was three problems with this

- **First** was that he was completely untrained to run a major military campaign. His father, feeling he was frivolous and too young, had denied Nicholas any serious training in administration or military science. By the time Nicholas ascended the throne there no longer existed the infrastructure to train a sitting emperor, and even if they did Nicholas had an autocratic nature that made it impossible to accept correction from teachers.
- **Second** was that Nicholas lacked strong channels of information into the military. Orders from him in the Kremlin were largely meaningless since they were made in response to information that rarely was truthful about conditions at the front.

- **Third** and finally, the ruling council felt that if Nicolas made himself a military leader then setbacks at the front would result in revolution. Nicholas ignored all of these issues and went ahead, taking command of the army with a letter to his uncle, its head during the first year of the war.

Russia, then as now, was one of the most corrupt nations to hold status as a world power, with up to 90% of each Ruble spent on defense failing to reach military units on the front.

Comment 2 Balance of power – Putin walks a tight rope between the pacifists and the militarists in the Kremlin and in the overall Russian power structure. He has held them together for nearly 20 years, maintaining a relative “peace,” but fissures are now appearing with the militarists seeming to gain traction and influence.

This power balance is what has held the Russian Federation together and it remains to be seen how any rupture in the arrangement will affect not only Russian internal politics but also global relationships.

Success denied: Finding ground truth in the air war over Ukraine - Ukraine’s recent two-front counteroffensive has dealt a heavy blow to the Russian military. Contrary to Western military orthodoxy, air superiority was not a prerequisite for battlefield success. Ukrainian forces advanced rapidly despite the absence of aerial cover and fire support from high-end fighter jets and bombers—two mainstays of the American way of war.

Some observers may conclude – all too hastily – that the air domain and airpower is less relevant to future wars, or that Russian ineptitude renders lessons about airpower’s role unhelpful.

This is a dangerous misreading of events.

Far from irrelevant, control of the air domain was the battle’s center of gravity. By adopting an air denial strategy, that is, maintaining an air defense in being to keep Russia’s manned aircraft at bay and under threat, Kyiv thwarted Russia’s ability to not only to ascertain the disposition of Ukrainian forces but also to respond rapidly to events once it became obvious where the counterattacks were taking place. Quite simply, air denial – not the traditional concept of air superiority – was a prerequisite for Ukraine’s battlefield success. (**Comment** – they were also greatly aided by Ukrainian partisan fighters and scouts behind enemy lines feeding back precise coordinates to Ukrainian battle command stations).

For months, Kyiv telegraphed its plans to launch a counteroffensive in the southern Kherson region. But they had a surprise in store for the Russians: they not only counterattacked in the south, as expected, but they also pushed north in the Kharkiv region. This second – surprise – counteroffensive caught the Russians off guard: they had redeployed many units in anticipation of the Ukrainian counteroffensive in Kherson and left their defenses in the northeast too thin. As Russian forces fled, Ukraine liberated more territory in a few days than the adversary had captured over the last five months.

How did Ukraine manage to catch the Russians unawares? Ukraine’s strategy of air denial enabled its counteroffensive in two key ways:

- **First**, it facilitated Ukraine’s use of military deception to pin down Russian forces in the south. Without air superiority, Russia could not freely operate its manned intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) aircraft over the battlefield, which limited its ability to track Ukrainian movements. The alternatives, employing unmanned aircraft (drones) and space-based assets in ISR roles, were ineffective. Though less costly than manned aircraft, ISR drones’ high attrition from both being shot down and electronic jamming meant they were needed in mass. Russia, however lacked sufficient numbers of ISR drones, particularly the Orlan-10 which took heavy losses early in the war and have become problematic to replace due to Western sanctions.

Russia's only other "eyes in the sky" are its space-based capabilities. But Russian satellites lacked the coverage and resolution required to detect a coming counteroffensive. Pavel Luzin, a Russian military expert, admits as much, explaining: "Our two optical reconnaissance satellites yield such [low] resolution [images] they can only map flight missions [for launching] missiles." These satellites, he added, "pass the same point only once every 16 days. There's no possibility to quickly receive data." Far from limiting Ukraine's military effectiveness, a strategy of air denial made operational deception possible by effectively blinding the Russians. (**Comment** –According to experts and open-source information, Russia has long been saddled with a small and inadequate fleet of communications and surveillance satellites that in many cases rely on either outdated technology or imported parts that are now harder to come by due to Western sanctions. In principle, Russia is practically blind in orbit).

- **Second**, Ukraine's air denial strategy prevented Russia from responding rapidly to halt Ukrainian advance even once it recognized a second counterattack was underway in the Kharkiv region. The comparative advantage of airpower is the ability of aircraft and other airborne systems to bypass terrain that would otherwise impede the movements of ground forces for the rapid maneuver of firepower over significant distances. This combination of lethality and responsiveness makes airpower particularly effective against mechanized ground forces operating offensively.

Whereas a defender in position is harder to detect from the air, an attacker on the move generates noise, heat, and electronic signals that makes it easier to find and attack. Ukrainian tanks and military vehicles rumbling down highways and across open fields in broad daylight should have made easy work for the Russian air force. But Ukraine's air denial strategy made Russian pilots wary of flying into Ukrainian airspace at all, much less loitering and hunting for targets on their own.

Instead, Russian warplanes attack targets with known coordinates called in by Russian ground forces. But their shortage of reliable tactical reconnaissance drones means many of its ground units cannot see what is over the next hill, further degrading reconnaissance-strike capabilities. In sum, Ukraine's air denial strategy in combination with insufficient quantities of attritable Russian drones were critical enablers of Ukraine's counteroffensive success.

Airpower's contribution to victory was perhaps more subtle and indirect but no less vital than the role it played in recent US-waged wars. To be sure, Ukraine's strategy of air denial resulted more from military necessity than deliberate stratagem, given the relatively small size of the Ukrainian air force. But the key point is that Ukraine's success stemmed from more than merely capitalizing on Russian failure.

Critically, air denial enabled Ukraine to initially survive and regroup, following Russia's February invasion. They traded time for space to grind down the Russian offensive, weakening invading forces, rendering them vulnerable to counterattack. As Clausewitz wrote, "the defensive form of war is not a simple shield, but a shield made up a well-directed blows."

Similarly, a strategy of air denial aligns well with US strategic objectives. The US is on the strategic defensive in both Europe and the Indo-Pacific and seeks to preserve the territorial status quo. If the USAF moves away from the few and exquisite high-end fighters and bombers it favors, and invests instead in low-end, attritable capabilities, it will make it next to impossible for future adversaries to succeed on offense. But if it clings to an offense-first, air superiority mission, it may share the fate of Russia's air force: surprised, unprepared, and largely sidelined from the fight.

U.S. Air Force Col. Maximillian K. Bremer is the director of the Special Programs Division at Air Mobility Command. The opinions in this commentary do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Defense Department or the U.S. Air Force.

Ukraine seizes dozens of Russian tanks left by fleeing forces - Ukraine's military has grabbed dozens of tanks left by fleeing Russian troops in the east, adding crucial weaponry to its arsenal nearly seven months into a war where both sides have lost manpower and machinery.

One source put the number of tanks captured around 200, without specifying how many of those were operational or able to be repaired. At least some were destroyed. Another said the cache included later design models such as T-80 tanks. The haul -- a third person described it as a significant outcome -- is likely to ease some pressure on Ukraine's forces as they head into a potentially difficult winter, when the terrain is set to become boggy and harder to navigate without tanks. At the same time, the government in Kyiv is set to keep up its calls for more weapons from the US and its European allies, and the Russian tanks will need to be supplemented with Western-produced equipment.

Russia will lose the war against Ukraine - Things are going to get even worse for Vladimir Putin's soldiers, and infighting in Russian society will intensify with each new defeat.

When Putin decided to start rebuilding the Soviet Union by conquering Ukraine, he didn't realize that Russia's industrial base was too weak to support his military adventures. As his promises of international greatness clash with reality on the battlefield, he faces discontent and accusations of defeatism and, worse, treason.

One thing Russia has always been good at is amassing territory. Someone calculated that between around 1450, when the Grand Duchy of Muscovy came into its own, and the demise of the Russian Empire in 1917, it expanded at the average rate of three square kilometers per hour.

World War I brought an end to the empire. Lenin denounced Russian imperialism, declaring the principle of national self-determination. Some nations on the western edge of the empire broke loose, but the Red Army brought Ukraine, Transcaucasia and Central Asia back into the fold. The Bolsheviks married Russia's expansionist drive to their millenarian ideology, developing a version of the land grab based on a supposedly scientific claim of the inevitable worldwide triumph of communism.

The task of spreading communism by the bayonet -- and keeping it there -- required a large war machine, which in turn required a powerful industrial base. Stalin's industrialization thus gave absolute priority to military production. During the 1930s, and before Hitler's rearmament gained momentum, the Soviet Union produced more tanks than the rest of the world combined.

It generated the best equipment and manpower, as well as advanced technology and science. Military jobs paid well and attracted the best graduates. Some 15-20% of Soviet GDP was devoted to the military-industrial complex, and the true share was probably higher since some civilian production also served the needs of the Defense Ministry and its agencies.

The Soviet Union never stopped spreading communism (and Moscow's domination) with satellites added in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Much of that was done indirectly through military aid, but it used its own troops to invade Afghanistan in 1979. At the same time, in countries where the Soviet-style system had already been established, the Brezhnev Doctrine envisioned the use of Soviet troops to prevent regime change -- as in Czechoslovakia in 1968.

Unlike the Bolsheviks, Gorbachev promised a definitive break with Russia's imperial ambitions. He allowed a major rollback in Eastern Europe in 1989, and then the Soviet Union too collapsed, creating 14 new nations, some of which never been independent states.

The reality of post-Soviet Russia

Post-Soviet Russia still contains nearly 200 ethnic groups ranging from 3.7% of the population (the Tatars), to just a handful of representatives. But it now has the smallest territory in several centuries.

Gorbachev's was a political decision; then came market reforms that made it impossible for Russia to expand its territory by military means.

During the 1990s, Russia's economic model shifted from autarky to integration in the global economic system. As the prices of oil, natural gas and other commodities increased, boosting Russia's export revenues, it became easier to import rather than build domestic production. Russia became a textbook example of the Dutch syndrome, when a nation exporting natural resources suffers deindustrialization.

Meanwhile, the face of industrial production in the world also changed. Technological revolution made producers dependent on hi-tech and the US-centered hi-tech establishment. Globalization opened borders, creating an international division of labor and cross-border supply chains.

Russia's participation in this system was limited due to pervasive corruption, government interference, an ineffective legal system, and a generally poor business climate.

Deindustrialization and corruption had long been evident in the military industrial complex as well. According to a recent investigation by Russian journalists, Leninet, an enormous St. Petersburg defense contractor specializing in radars and navigation equipment, continues to produce at one-quarter of its three dozen facilities. The rest have been rented out or converted to shopping malls and residences.

Vast sums allocated to the development of new systems are routinely stolen or misappropriated, with nothing to show for it. Small wonder: its design bureau on the shores of the Gulf of Finland has been replaced by a villa for the owner, a friend of Putin's.

Lack of resources

Putin is no economist. When he decided to revive Russia's expansionist dreams and recapture old Soviet lands, he didn't realize how few weapons Russia produced and how much it relied on imported components. Such components were cut off by sanctions; and countries that don't support Western sanctions are apprehensive of selling to Russia for fear of incurring sanctions of their own.

But after years of relentless propaganda, Russians still see their country as a military superpower.

And all of a sudden it can't defeat Ukraine, which in their imperial arrogance they have always treated with disdain and have been taught to regard as a failed state. Faced with this unsettling disconnect, jingoist right-wingers, used to applauding Putin's invasion, have changed their tune. Surely Russia is failing because treason has reached high into the Kremlin and Putin is taking direct instructions from Biden?

Russia's hawks claim that it is fighting with one hand tied behind its back. They want a nationwide mobilization, a set of wartime emergency decrees, and an economy on a war footing. They demand carpet bombings of Kyiv, Lviv and other cities, and annihilation of civilian infrastructure such as power plants, railway lines, bridges and dams across Ukraine. Some even call for blowing up nuclear power plants and using tactical nuclear weapons. Anything less would be cowardice or treason.

The truth is that Russia can no longer do it, simply lacking the required resources and firepower. A major escalation of the war, and more war crimes by Russia, will only bring more weapons – and more advanced weapons – to Ukraine.

Ukrainians are getting better at using them and are learning to fight a modern war. Things are going to get even worse for Putin's soldiers, and infighting in Russian society will intensify with each new defeat. (The Jerusalem Post).

Prisoner exchange - Two detained Americans were released in a wide-ranging prisoner exchange yesterday between Ukraine and Russia. The US citizens were Alexander Druke and Andy Huynh, "both military veterans from Alabama" who went missing around Kharkiv in June, ABC News reported Wednesday. Turkish officials brokered the deal, which included 215 people released by Moscow, according to the Wall Street Journal. "In return, Ukraine released 55 Russians and Viktor Medvedchuk, a confidant of Mr. Putin," the Journal reports.

188 of the released Ukrainians had fought in defense of the port city of Mariupol, including 108 from what's known as Ukraine's "Azov" regiment; their release infuriated military bloggers sympathetic to Putin's invasion, as the Journal's headline indicates.

Impacts

Russia and China – As Russia grows increasingly isolated from traditional partners, and with a fast-encroaching EU deadline for ceasing all energy resources from them, it is becoming alarmingly dependent upon China for its survival.

Russia needs China now more than ever, a situation that will only exacerbate in the months ahead.

But there exist multiple challenges in this relationship, not the least of which is that Russia still continues to occupy swathes of Chinese territory.

There is the unresolved issue of 600,000 square kilometres of Chinese territory near Vladivostok, occupied by Russia since 1860, pictured right.

After Stalin's death, relations between China and Russia deteriorated quickly. Mao hated Moscow's de-Stalinization - which he saw as a direct attack on his own personality cult - and the Soviets did not understand why China focused on the peasantry instead of the urban proletariat to advance socialism.

According to the Russian embassy, the history of Vladivostok - which means Ruler of the East - is from 1860 when Russia built a major military harbour.



But China says "the city was Haishenwai as Chinese land before Russia annexed it via [the] unequal Treaty of Beijing".

The land became part of the Qing empire in 1689, under the Treaty of Nerchinsk, the first ever treaty between Tzarist Russia and the Qing. The 1860 Peking Treaty reversed the Nerchinsk document and granted the area to Russia.

"It provides a basic limit to how closely Russia and China will work together," according to Chinese thought leaders.

For now, Beijing does not seem inclined to criticize Russia in the way it has been relentlessly attacking the UK for imposing "150 years of shame" on China - the period covering Britain's colonization of Hong Kong.

But, according to these thought leaders, Moscow knows, and the issue will continue to hang dangerously over relations between the two countries.

The relationship improved after the start of China's Open-Door policy in 1978 and the visit of Soviet leader Michael Gorbachev in 1989.

But in that same year, the ultimate demise of European communism started, leading to the fall of the Soviet Union itself, something for which Beijing blamed Gorbachev.

Today, the two countries find common ground in their shared regret of the fall of the USSR, their dislike of the US, and the eastward expansion of NATO.

In today's world Russia will soon be dependent upon China for the vast majority of its foreign income - revenue for oil and gas exports.

China is still sympathetic to Russia's situation, but purely from a self-interest perspective.

They clearly and always will remember the Nanking slaughter in the 1930's and have a revulsion and zero tolerance for such invasion and occupation tactics. They do not appreciate Russian behavior in Ukraine and with increasing reports being received of atrocities, their thoughts will harken back to the dark days of their nationalist memory.

For now, it behooves China to support Russia, but we should not expect this to be ever-lasting. It will only last as long as China wants it to and as long as it suits their long-term goals.

63% of Russia's economy is tied to crude oil and natural gas. They are being forced to divert outflows from the EU to the east into China and south into India.

There is a limit to how much flow they can divert, governed by pipeline availability and capacity. It takes decades to plan, fund and construct international pipelines, and they are subject to sabotage.

Russia is ridiculously dependent upon this export sector, and increasingly and as ridiculously dependent upon China as a customer for these commodities.

Both China and India has voiced their displeasure with the Ukrainian invasion, with India progressively moving its stance from east to west (see following article).

China will be keenly aware of this dependency and, cometh the day, will at some stage start to exert its geopolitical position at Russia's expense.

It may demand a return of these swathes of land, may exert pressure on other elements such as technology and energy, but whatever it is, it will come.

How is Putin or the Kremlin going to explain the loss of the major Russian port of Vladivostok, loss of ownership of major industries like crude oil or being the subordinate partner in a huge geopolitical alignment?

Not very well I imagine. But that day surely approaches.

Russia Is losing India - India's initial reluctance to condemn Russia for its war against Ukraine has been the subject of much debate and criticism in the West. In mid-March, Jen Psaki, then the White House press secretary, urged India to reflect on "where you stand when history books are written at this moment in time." Numerous world leaders and diplomats expressed impatience with India for effectively abetting a Russian agenda by remaining on the side-lines.

Some analysts and former policymakers in strategic circles in New Delhi insist that such a reproach is unfair and fails to appreciate India's nuanced position on the war. India, they argue, is merely navigating between clashing geopolitical powers, Russia and the United States, that happen to be two of its major partners.

Yes, India notably abstained from key votes about the war in Ukraine in the United Nations (in the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Human Rights Council, and the International Atomic Energy Agency). But it has also toughened its statements about the invasion, decrying the killing of civilians and the violation of national sovereignty. New Delhi has its own concerns, this line of thinking runs, and doesn't want to jeopardize its relations with either Moscow or Washington.

A deeper look at Indian actions, however, suggests an altogether different reality. India is not backing Russia's invasion, nor is it simply balancing between two major powers. Instead, a subtle but major shift is underway: India's slow but inevitable decoupling from Russia.

Such a reorientation began before the invasion of Ukraine, but since accelerated. Although Russia remains for now an important source of both military equipment and energy, New Delhi is slowly extracting itself from any dependence on

Moscow. Deeply entrenched anti-Americanism, a staple of India's old strategic elite, is disappearing, and India and United States are now closer than ever before.

Russia's ties to China have grown stronger just as India and China's relationship has become rocky; border clashes in 2020 left India's government and strategic community viewing China as an existential challenge to Indian .

The contours of a future geopolitical framework are clear, with India drifting closer to the West and the U.S. to hedge against China and, in the process, withdrawing from its long partnership with Russia. This decoupling will not happen overnight, and Indian and Russian officials will make concerted efforts to keep the relationship afloat, perhaps for years to come. But larger geopolitical pressures will invariably drive India and Russia apart.

The exodus continues for ordinary Russians - Shortly after Vladimir Putin ordered his country's first war mobilization since World War II on Wednesday, prices for one-way plane tickets out of Moscow immediately skyrocketed—as we relayed Wednesday—and border crossings began surging across locations in Finland and Georgia, Reuters reported Thursday from the capital cities of Helsinki and Tbilisi. The BBC reports a 3-mile long wait for at least one border crossing into Georgia.

Protests against Putin's mobilization erupted across at least 38 Russian cities - leading to the arrests of more than 1,300 people, according to a monitoring group called OVD-Info. "Now the courts are starting to consider the administrative cases brought against the protesters. And they are already imposing fines and arrests on them," OVD says.

Putin's 300,000-man recruiting surge: "Russia is likely to struggle with the logistical and administrative challenges of even mustering the 300,000 personnel," many of which "are unlikely to be combat effective for months," the British military tweeted Thursday in its latest Ukraine update. From London's point of view, "Putin is accepting considerable political risk in the hope of generating much needed combat power," the military said. "The move is effectively an admission that Russia has exhausted its supply of willing volunteers to fight in Ukraine," they added, and predicted, "Even this limited mobilization is likely to be highly unpopular with parts of the Russian population."

Behind the number: Independent Russian newspaper Novaya Gazeta reports there is a "secret seventh paragraph" in Putin's Wednesday decree that permits calling up one million Russians for Putin's Ukraine invasion, according to a government source.

Comment – There is also language, in small print, that allows the Kremlin to call up any Russian it desires. There are reports already filtering in that the military is serving call-up papers at bus stops and other institutions.

Sanctions

Operating System Platform - The Russian government is having to switch from Windows to Linux operating systems because of damaging Western sanctions, according to a report Tuesday from the Russian daily newspaper Kommersant. One big worry? "Many systems will have to be rebuilt from scratch, and there are few Linux experts around," researcher Janis Kluge tweeted.

EU ministers agree to press ahead with new Russia sanctions - EU foreign ministers agreed yesterday to prepare new sanctions on Russia and increase weapons' deliveries to Kyiv after President Vladimir Putin ordered the country's first wartime mobilization since World War Two to fight in Ukraine.

The bloc's 27 foreign ministers are in New York for the annual gathering of world leaders at the United Nations.

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said Putin's announcement - which included moves to annex swaths of Ukrainian territory and a threat to use nuclear weapons to defend Russia - showed panic and desperation.

Putin

Stop the war - Chinese President Xi and Indian Prime Minister Modi chose what is sometimes called the “Asian way” – avoiding confrontation and public humiliation – in conveying their deep concern over the devastating impacts of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in their respective bilateral meetings with Russian President Vladimir Putin last week.

While PM Modi was more direct in stating that the war was “wrong.” President Xi opted for subtler language. But their message that Putin should “reconsider” the war was clear.

The Russian leader seemed to listen seriously to the advice of the leaders of the two large nations, both of which abstained from voting on a UN Security Council resolution condemning the Feb. 24 invasion.

Another top Russian dies - Top Russian aviation expert dies after falling down stairs - A top Russian aviation expert, who once worked as the head of Moscow’s Aviation Institute (MAI), has died after falling down the stairs at the institute's headquarters yesterday.

Anatoly Gerashchenko is said to have slipped and tumbled down the stairs - he is one of a number of Russian elites who have died in recent months.

In a statement, the MAI said: “On September 21, 2022, Anatoly Nikolaevich Gerashchenko, Doctor of Technical Sciences, professor, adviser to the rector of the Moscow Aviation Institute, passed away as a result of an accident.

A report said Gerashchenko 'fell from a height, flying down several flights of stairs'.

Flights from Russia sell out minutes after Putin announces mobilization - "All tickets for direct flights to Istanbul and Yerevan were sold out in a few minutes after Putin's address," the publication's Twitter page wrote in a caption.

It also shared screenshots of the pages and how they could not be booked.

Russia’s demographic problems make Putin’s mobilization plans explosive - Russia’s demographic problems, including the extremely high male mortality among working-age groups (Socio.bas-net.by, accessed September 21; Nakanune.ru, August 1) and the declining size of the Russian nation, especially in rural areas where most soldiers come from and opposition to the war is growing (Siberia.Realities, August 24), impose serious constraints on Moscow’s ability to effectively carry out the “partial mobilization” announced by President Vladimir Putin on September 21.

The relative increase in the share of men in their 20s and 30s from non-Russian areas who also oppose the war in Ukraine makes this task evermore daunting (Caucasus Post, June 18).

At the same time, given these problems, any level of mobilization will limit Russia’s ability to turn its economy around by removing from the workforce some of its most productive workers (Publizist.ru, November 21). This policy will also hamper the Kremlin’s ability to prevent growing anti-war attitudes among non-Russian nations from morphing into more serious nationalist challenges to the center (Idel-ural.org, September 15).

As a result, if this mobilization proceeds, and especially if Moscow is compelled to mobilize more than the 300,000 men as announced this week, the central government may be compelled to seek a quick end to the fighting, lest Putin and his regime suffer from corrosive economic and political consequences in the near future.

Putin's order for 300,000 fighters drives Russians to the streets in protest - It appears as though Putin may be losing his tight grip on the Russian people, and at a time in which he has already appeared rather desperate.

He announced yesterday that the Russian military would be forcefully conscripting 300,000 men to go to war in Ukraine – where his troops have largely been providing easy target practice for the local military.

But the news hasn't sat well with Russians, many of whom faced decades-long prison sentences to protest Putin in the streets. More than 1,300 people have been arrested at demonstrations across Russia against President Vladimir Putin's announcement of a partial mobilization of civilians to fight in Ukraine, a police monitoring group said Wednesday.

The OVD-Info monitoring group counted at least 1,332 people detained at rallies in 38 different cities across the country after Putin's morning address to the nation.

Putin's highly unpopular war has been a quagmire from the start, and military experts are unsure that the Kremlin can even supply or feed another 300,000 troops, let alone in time to prevent Ukraine from continuing to mow through Moscow's military, pushing east to the border.

By announcing mobilization, Putin has declared war on his own country - The Russian Federation's panic and Ukraine's indifference are not accidental. Putin's announcement of partial (more on this below) mobilization is much more dangerous for Russians.

Not long ago, the main issues Russian citizens were facing were not being able to buy foreign currency and Western brands leaving the country; now saving themselves from being sent to the frontlines, staying alive, healthy, and, if possible, free will become Russian men's national sport. Vladimir Putin really wants to go down in history, and he is dragging a whole population that was hoping to remain alive for a little bit longer with him.

The president's 15-minute-long morning speech, recorded the day before and aired at 9:00 AM on 21 September, was a classic example of his addresses to the nation. The main part of the speech focused on international politics — in it, Putin congratulated himself on his wisdom (the decision to start the special military operation was the correct one), scolded his enemies (the West did not leave us any choice, how dare Ukraine fight back when he gave it the chance to quietly suffer), and declared that the existence of Russia and its sovereignty were at stake (why gamble with them in the first place?).

To resolve certain difficulties that had arisen during the special military operation, mobilization — or, calling a spade a spade, forced deployment of civilians to their death — was declared. The part of the speech on social assistance to soldiers was brief but effective — in it, the president said that all mobilized soldiers would get the same payments as contract servicemen. Usually during this part of a peacetime national address, the president would resolve all issues by announcing a “one-time payout of 10,000 rubles (€160)”, but the quotes have become a bit higher in wartime.

There is no going back: the strategic military game Putin is playing with Russian and Ukrainian lives can end either with a total failure of the strategist or some unknown “new world order,”

It is interesting that Russian propaganda, which is adamant about the need to go all-in, seeing as there is no other way (except for the Hague) out, is correct in its assessments. Political scientists are still trying to find traces of some subtle political calculations in Putin's actions, but the truth is that his actions ever since 24 February have been so predictable that any figure head from the state's Channel One Russia can analyze them with full understanding of what is happening. There is no longer a line between the propaganda and the political government of Russia.

Putin and, following him, Russia's Defence Minister Shoigu's speeches evoked the idea that there was no reason for concern: they are only missing some 300,000 reservists for the construction of their “new world order” on the “line of contact”, thus, the mobilization will allegedly only affect people that have military specializations, previously served in

the army, and have military experience. It is hard to comprehend during exactly which wars 300,000 Russians were supposed to gain military experience, but the fact remains — in the published text of Putin’s decree, there is no indication that mobilization is “partial” (except for the decree title).

The decree has ten paragraphs —

- the first one declares to start mobilization immediately, starting from yesterday, 21 September
- the second paragraph equates mobilized soldiers to contract servicemen
- the third one defines the degrees of their monetary compensation
- the fourth paragraph indicates that all military service contracts are to be deemed permanent — they will be enforced until the end of mobilization; civilians are no longer allowed to terminate military service contracts on a voluntary basis. This paragraph applies to all contract servicemen and will basically hold them in bondage to the Defence Ministry, depriving them of an opportunity to legally cease their participation in hostilities.
- According to the fifth paragraph, termination of a contract is allowed only due to old age, health conditions, or after receipt of a court sentence that will lead to imprisonment.
- the sixth paragraph places the responsibility of financing mobilization on the federal government.
- the seventh paragraph is, as of the moment of publication, missing on the official Kremlin website. It is an “internal use paragraph,” addressed to the Defence Ministry — civilians are not allowed to know the full text of the document, on the basis of which they are being sent to war, for reasons of secrecy. The president’s spokesman Dmitry Peskov declared that the seventh paragraph indicated the total number of people to mobilize, presumably those 300,000.
- the eighth paragraph designates regional governors (this is important, more below) as the people responsible for mobilization, i.e. recruiters. At the same time, the deadlines and the total number of mobilized soldiers are determined by the Defence Ministry.
- the ninth paragraph indicates that employees of defence enterprises get an exemption from the mobilization, while the other types of exemptions are to be established by the government. The tenth paragraph states that the decree comes into effect the moment it is published, thus, it is already enforced.

Whether the mobilization has any military point will become clear in a couple of months, when the units containing ex-civilians reach the frontlines. Two main questions for right now are: how will the mobilization be organised and how will Russian society react to it?

The impossible mobilization - Yesterday Putin signed a decree on partial mobilization (Kremlin.ru, September 21) and issued a public statement in which he claimed that the Russian Armed Forces in Ukraine are de facto confronting the West (Kremlin.ru, September 21).

However, an official state of war has not been proclaimed, and the parameters of the partial mobilization, its schedule and number of mobilized personnel have been classified in the decree. Russian Minister of Defense Shoigu only clarified that the mobilization plan calls for at least 300,000 soldiers to be mobilized during an unknown period (Interfax, September 21).

All this testifies that Moscow faces a crucial shortage of manpower and that the spring conscription of 2022, as well as the recruitment of volunteers and even prisoners has failed miserably. Meanwhile, an increasingly weak Russia is trying to escalate quickly, aiming to stave off defeat in Ukraine. Nevertheless, the mobilization became possible as a political decision, but it is still impossible technically and will bring more chaos into the Russian government, economy and society.

In February 1997, a federal law on mobilization and the accompanying training regime was passed in Russia (Pravo.gov.ru, July 14). The statute represented a politically motivated throwback to the Soviet era in response to, at

that time, growing resentment among the elites and society as a political reaction to the events in Chechnya in 1994–1996. This law contains the term “partial mobilization” but does not clarify it. Although, it does stipulate that the president of Russia should declare general or partial mobilization in case of aggression against Russia, or the immediate threat of such aggression. Thus, declaring partial mobilization in objective absence of such a threat definitely means that the Kremlin will either escalate the conflict itself or attempt to trade the threat of escalation.

Considering the federal law, mobilization, whether full-scale or partial, always presumes mobilization of the people together with mobilization of the authorities at all levels of government, as well as the mobilization of economy. As the situation presently stands, the Russian political-economic system, together with the Russian Armed Forces, is not prepared for this comprehensive undertaking due to a number of factors.

- First, the cadre units within the Russian Armed Forces that were previously designated for mobilization deployment have been eliminated since the military reforms of 2009–2012 (Nezavisimoye voyennoye obozreniye, December 12, 2008; Hse.ru, December 27, 2009). Considering that the real number of Russian units on the eve of the war did not exceed 770,000 troops (Sc.mil.ru, January 2017), instead of the nominal 1 million–strong pronouncement (Pravo.gov.ru, March 28, 2017), and that the number of ground forces, airborne troops and marines did not exceed 280,000, 45,000 and 35,000 soldiers, respectively (Iiss.org, February 2022), it is almost impossible to even reinforce existing military units with the mobilized recruits because of a lack of officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs) after seven months of heavy losses. And, as a result, it is all the more impossible to deploy new units.
- Second, the defense industry is unable to significantly extend its current manufacturing capacities (see EDM, June 16, July 7). Despite the fact that the Kremlin is trying to do something about these limitations, shortages in the workforce as well as with industrial equipment and necessary components do not allow Russian authorities to change the situation (Krasnaya zvezda, September 21).
- Third, only two types of mobilization have occurred in human history: the republican mobilization, similar to the process in today’s Ukraine that presumes democratic governance and trust between the people and political elite, and the violent mobilization, as took place during the Soviet times of Vladimir Lenin and Joseph Stalin or the Mao Zedong era in China. The violent approach presumes force, and, during the 20th century, communists across the world dealt mostly with massive rural populations, which made the cost of mobilization much lower. That is not the case with the modern urban populace. In this way, mobilization efforts in Russian cities may bring about unpredictable consequences that will be quite negative for the Kremlin.
- Fourth, after years of centralized dictatorship and the absence of federalism and self-governance, Russian regional and local authorities are virtually unable to realize sophisticated tasks, such as mobilization, in an effective manner, especially in the face of the next upcoming conscription period that should start on October 1.
- Fifth, regular training was not held for those who previously served in the military. Briefly speaking, most of them are reservists only on paper. By the early 2020s, the Russian Ministry of Defense had created a system in which reservists could sign contracts with low pay and attend regular exercises. However, the number of active reservists appeared to be low: no more than 20,000 in all military districts (Interfax-AVN, September 30, 2021; Mil.ru, October 14, 2021; VPK.name, January 27; Mil.ru, January 17).

All these factors mean that it will be nearly impossible for Moscow to effectively mobilize 300,000 soldiers. Nevertheless, the mobilization’s first sequence has already been initiated: Those soldiers, NCOs and officers who were expecting their military contracts (e.g., with the Russian Ministry of Defense or Rosgvardia) to expire soon are now forced to remain in active military service for an indefinite period. Even if the military is demoralized, the Kremlin may still consider the prevention of further turnover in the armed forces as critical no matter the costs.

Another evident sequence has been potential escalation of the war in Ukraine. Moscow is not going to give up, and it may try to drag the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) into the conflict, hoping to test the tensile strength of

renewed solidarity among NATO members and their readiness to directly fight against Russia. However, even a partial mobilization contributes significantly to delegitimizing the Kremlin in the eyes of its partners.

Moreover, spreading chaos within the Russian political-economic system related to the mobilization announcement raises questions about the future of Russia's statehood and the long-term limitations of Moscow's true military capabilities.

Two demographic factors will have the most impact and be greatly affected by Putin's mobilization plans: the declining size of the ethnic Russian population, especially those in the working-age cohort from which veterans would be drawn at the expense of the economy, and the still increasing numbers of non-Russian nations, many of which see themselves as having been misused by Moscow as "cannon fodder" in Ukraine.

Over the past two years, Russia's overall demographic travails have been largely ignored because most observers in Russia and beyond have assumed that any losses were the result of the coronavirus pandemic. But now it is clear that the overall decline in the Russian Federation's population, especially among ethnic Russians and those in working-age groups, while accelerated in 2020 and 2021 by COVID-19, is continuing at precisely the same rate as before (Rosbalt, September 16), with some demographers now predicting that the ethnic Russian nation itself will disappear entirely in 40 to 50 years (Business-gazeta.ru, September 18). That is almost certainly hyperbolic, but the Russian population is currently set to decline by 1 million or more each year for as far into the future as anyone can project.

Russian intended annexation of the 4 oblasts

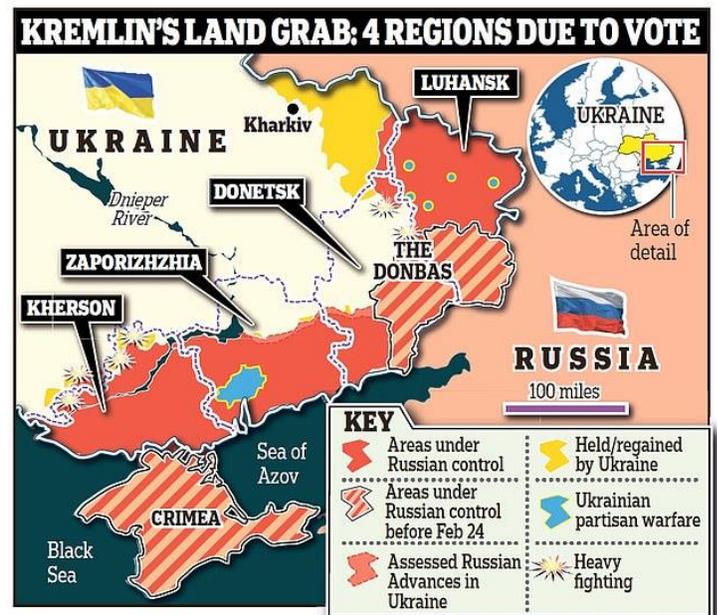
Russia has announced plans for referendums to take place in four regions of Ukraine it either fully or partially occupied – Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson

Accusing the West of trying to 'divide and destroy' Russia, Putin declared: 'Those trying to blackmail us with nuclear weapons should know that the tables can turn on them.'

The move puts him on a collision course with Kyiv and its Western allies who have already said that attacks to liberate areas under Russian control will not stop, and the results of any 'sham' referendums will not be recognised.

The four oblasts are contiguous and would link Crimea, which Moscow annexed in 2014, to Russia. Russian forces took Kherson and Zaporizhzhia in southern Ukraine in the early days of the war. Then, after failing to capture Kyiv, they launched a massive offensive in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine.

The self-styled Donetsk (DPR) and the Luhansk People's Republics (LPR), which Putin recognised as independent states just before the invasion on Feb. 24, have said they want referendums on joining Russia on Sept. 23-27 - that is this from tomorrow through Tuesday.



The Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions, which have yet to be recognised as independent states by Russia, have also said they will hold votes of their own. Russia does not fully control any of the four regions, with only around 60% of Donetsk region in Russian hands.

The territory that Russia does control amounts to more than 90,000 square km, or about 15% of Ukraine's total area - equal to the size of Hungary or Portugal.

If Russia goes ahead with the referendums and joins all four regions to Russia then Ukraine - and potentially its Western backers too - would, from a Russian perspective, be fighting against Russia itself.

That would raise the risk of a direct military confrontation between Russia and the NATO military alliance, a scenario that President Joe Biden has said could lead to World War Three, because NATO-members are supplying arms and giving intelligence to Ukraine.

As such, a rushed Russian move to formally annex another big chunk of Ukrainian territory would be a major escalation just days after potentially the most significant Russian battlefield defeat of the war in northeastern Ukraine.

Russia's nuclear doctrine allows the use of such weapons if it is attacked with nuclear or other weapons of mass destruction, or if the Russian state faces an existential threat from conventional weapons.

Containment

Ukraine asks Israel to share intel on Iranian support to Russian military - Ukraine asked Israel to share intelligence on any support Iran is giving to the Russian military in the war, senior Israeli officials told Axios.

Driving the news: Russia in recent days attacked several Ukrainian military positions with “Kamikaze drones” that Ukraine's military said were repainted Iranian Shahed-136 drones.

The U.S. and Ukraine have accused Iran of sending hundreds of sophisticated attack drones to Russia — an allegation Tehran denied.

Ukrainian military commanders told the Wall Street Journal the Iranian drones gave the Russians a significant advantage in several areas.

Between the lines: Russia and Iran have grown increasingly close as the world seeks to isolate Moscow because of its invasion.

The deepening ties also come as efforts to revive the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, which would remove most of the sanctions that have been imposed on Tehran, continue but without any breakthrough.

Behind the scenes: Israel's deputy director general for Euro-Asia Simona Halperin, who is in charge of the Russia and Ukraine files, visited Kyiv with the Israeli ambassador on Sept. 7. They met with Maksym Subkh, Ukraine's special representative for the Middle East, according to Israeli officials.

America will hit Russia's military with 'devastating strike' if Putin nukes Ukraine, says US general - America will retaliate with 'a devastating strike' against Russia's military if Putin uses nuclear weapons in Ukraine, the United States Army's former European commander has warned.

The comments come after the Russian premier sent shockwaves around the world, as he announced the 'partial mobilization' of his reserve military forces to continue his murderous invasion of Ukraine.

And in a chilling warning directed squarely at Western and Nato leaders, Putin insisted he would use 'all means' necessary to defend territory seized or set to be annexed by Kremlin forces before threatening to use nuclear weapons.

'If there is a threat to the territorial integrity of our country, and in protecting our people we will certainly use all means to us – and I'm not bluffing,' he then added during his televised address to the Russian people on Wednesday morning.



Retired Lieutenant General Ben Hodges, who commanded the US Army in Europe between 2014 and 2018, stressed the 'possibility' of Putin ordering a nuclear strike on Ukraine was 'very unlikely'.

But he said the use of any strategic weapons of mass destruction would be met with a swift and severe reaction from American President Joe Biden.

The US could launch 'devastating strikes' on Russian military targets in Crimea and the Black Sea, pictured, if Putin nukes Ukraine, a former US Army commander has warned today

But if nuclear weapons were fired, Gen Hodges said the US could seek to attack military bases in annexed Ukrainian territory and Russia's prized Black Sea Fleet

'He [Putin] knows the US will have to respond if Russia uses a nuclear weapon,' Gen Hodges told MailOnline.

'The US response may not be nuclear...but could very well be a devastating strike that could, for example, destroy the Black Sea Fleet or destroy Russian bases in Crimea.

'So, I think President Putin and those around him will be reluctant to draw the US into the conflict directly.'

Potential areas of attack for the US, if Russia does launch a nuclear strike, could include the naval port of Sevastopol on Crimea's western coast, which has been occupied by the Kremlin's forces since the peninsula was annexed in 2014.

Worried, Moscow has already moved some of its Kilo-class attack submarines from the Crimean peninsula to southern Russia over fears of them being struck by long-range Ukrainian fire, according to British intelligence.

In a daily briefing on Tuesday, the Ministry of Defence said those submarines had 'almost certainly' been moved to Krasnodar Krai in mainland Russia, instead of a naval base at Sevastopol on the Crimean peninsula.

The move comes as Putin faces the possible collapse of his so-called 'special military operation' after a stunning Ukrainian counter-attack last week which has seen Russian forces in the north-west driven back over the Ukrainian border.

With reported manpower issues and a critical shortage of military gear, Putin doubled-down on his assault of Ukraine, announcing the 'partial mobilization' of 300,000 military reservists – a first in Russia since the Second World War – and referendums in occupied areas of Ukraine to make them part of Russia.

UK Defence Secretary responds to Putin's nuclear bomb threat to the West - UK Defence Secretary Ben Wallace has responded to Vladimir Putin's chilling nuclear bomb threat to the West.

Wallace has now responded to the threat, saying: "President Putin's breaking of his own promises not to mobilize parts of the population and the illegal annexation of parts of Ukraine are an admission that his invasion is failing.

"He and his defence minister have sent tens of thousands of their own citizens to their deaths, ill-equipped and badly led.

"No amount of threats and propaganda can hide the fact that Ukraine is winning this war, the international community are united, and Russia is becoming a global pariah."

Ukraine asks Israel to share intel on Iranian support to Russian military -

'Putin's thrashing about in impotent rage' - Russia has started to shell Ukraine's critical infrastructure more intensively as response to the successful Kharkiv counteroffensive. Strikes targeting Ukraine's power grid have caused partial or full blackout in the regions of Kharkiv, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, Dnipro, and Sumy, President Zelensky says.

Many people in those regions now lack water supply, too. Mykhailo Podolyak, adviser to Zelensky, has stated that "direct and deliberate strikes against the critical civilian infrastructure, including the Kharkiv heat and power plant, is with no doubt an act of terrorism which demonstrates Russia's willingness to leave civilians with no electricity and heating." The blackout caused the Kharkiv rapid transit system to stop operation and set trolleybuses in Poltava on fire after a voltage swing, Ukraine's media report. Kharkiv's mayor Ihor Terekhov also reported that the missile strikes had continued in the following days; the city suffered one more blackout on 12 September when another critical infrastructure facility was targeted by Russia.

"Both Ukraine and the rest of the civilized world can see these acts of terrorism even through this impenetrable darkness," Zelensky said. "Those were deliberate and cynical missile strikes against our civilian infrastructure, and not at all military facilities."

A catastrophic menace

International practice defines critical infrastructure as facilities that are essential for the functioning of a society and economy, namely, power, water supply and drainage facilities, as well as transportation ones. In wintertime, heating facilities are also included. Destroying heating and water supply facilities may cripple the city's daily living activities for a long time. Even one day with no electricity, water supply, and drainage is enough to cause a humanitarian catastrophe in huge settlements where people mainly reside in multi-story buildings.

"Russia started shelling civilian infrastructure as early as 24 February," Anton Pustovalov, a journalist and historian who started collecting evidence of Russia's war crimes in Ukraine when the war started has told Novaya Gazeta. Europe. "Telephone links and communications were their top priority. The most notable act in this regard was the hit of a TV Tower in Kyiv's Babyn Yar in early March. They started shelling rail junctions, railway stations and even trains with refugees in the same period.

Vengeance upon Ukraine's civilians

"Strikes against Ukraine's civilian infrastructure are not only unnecessary from the military viewpoint, but they are also strategically pointless," an anonymous Russian military expert has told Novaya Gazeta. Europe. "Such decision, I

believe, must have been approved by the top military brass if not Putin himself. I hear that the General Staff and the FSB tried to dissuade him from doing this as this wouldn't give Russia's army any advantage and would only drain the country's shrinking missile stock.

"If Putin thinks that leaving Ukrainians with no power supply would turn them against Zelensky, this isn't going to work either."

The expert believes that the key to understanding why Russia is shelling Ukraine's power plants is probably behind Zelensky's recent offer he made to the Western countries which implied exchanging Ukraine's excess electricity for natural gas. "Putin has been forced to fight a war of attrition and is relying on natural factors now, I believe, as he is planning to commit genocide against Ukrainians by freezing them to death in the wintertime," the expert says.

"This will not, however, provide him a shortcut to victory and will only bring him closer to the prisoner's dock in the Hague since such actions, as I said, are strategically senseless. All Putin is doing now looks more like thrashing about in impotent rage. Russia's troops seem to act indifferent. They have orders, they obey those orders, and let their leader make decisions."

Using nuclear weapons as the last possible threat is what the expert calls "a desperate suicidal act" as this would likely force NATO to intervene, causing even bigger escalation of the conflict.

GeoPolitics

Dodik travels to Moscow for meeting with Putin ahead of elections - The Serb member of Bosnia-Herzegovina's tripartite presidency, Milorad Dodik, yesterday met in Moscow Putin and received the Russian leader's backing in his upcoming bid for reelection.

Dodik, who is running for reelection to the Bosnian Serb presidency on October 2, has met with Putin seven times since 2014, according to Putin's office. Many of the meetings have taken place ahead of elections when Dodik wants to show the pro-Russian Bosnian Serb electorate that he has the Russian leader's support.

GeoMilitary

There is a real danger that Kazakhstan will become drawn into the war in Ukraine - By any measure, Russia's mobilization means an escalation of conflict. Hence, the war in Ukraine is now entering a new and possibly much more dangerous phase.

Earlier the Kremlin repeatedly declared that its 'special military operation' in Ukraine was going according to plan, but military observers said Russian forces were depleted and increasingly dispirited. And there is no light visible at the end of the tunnel in the Ukraine conflict.

It is rather unclear how the latest steps by the Kremlin will have an immediate impact on the ground. By themselves, they appear to be half-hearted. There were expectations that the Kremlin would have enough resolve to declare nation-wide mobilization and introduce martial law throughout the Russian Federation, since 'otherwise the desired result could not be achieved.' But such a decision was not made. There are maybe some other options out of the situation, being considered by the Russian leadership. It is, however, hard to say for sure whether that is so or not.

What is clear is the Kremlin faces growing political and societal pressure to show at least some success in the conflict. Common Russians are also understandably upset about their country not being supported by its allies with special emphasis placed on Kazakhstan.

Against such a background and given stalling war activities in Ukraine, there is likely to be talk in Moscow about calling on 'our CSTO allies' to help Russian military forces and Ukrainian separatist formations to try and change the situation to their advantage.

So a logical question arises – what is the extent of the danger that Kazakhstan may become drawn by Russia into a war it is waging against not only the Ukrainian army, but, as Putin himself has said, 'the entire military machine of the collective West'? Such a danger could become quite real in the near future, unless Kazakh leadership take timely measures to prevent it.

This is not the first time that Russia has had clashes with the West. What's new is that in Russia the Russian-Ukrainian war now is increasingly being seen as the Patriotic war, i.e. as a defensive war for one's homeland. In other words, the bulk of the Russian elites and society tends to consider it individual self-defense by Russia against the United States and NATO.