

Conflict Update # 39

April 24th, 2022

Conflict Assessment

Russian forces continued to pressure Ukrainian defenders in the Azovstal facility in Mariupol.

Ukrainian sources report that Russian troops are preparing to conduct renewed assaults on Azovstal that would likely prove costly—possibly to meet a Kremlin-imposed deadline to clear Mariupol—but ISW cannot independently confirm these reports.

Russian forces secured limited gains northwest of Severodonetsk but remain unlikely to be able to launch massed offensive operations.

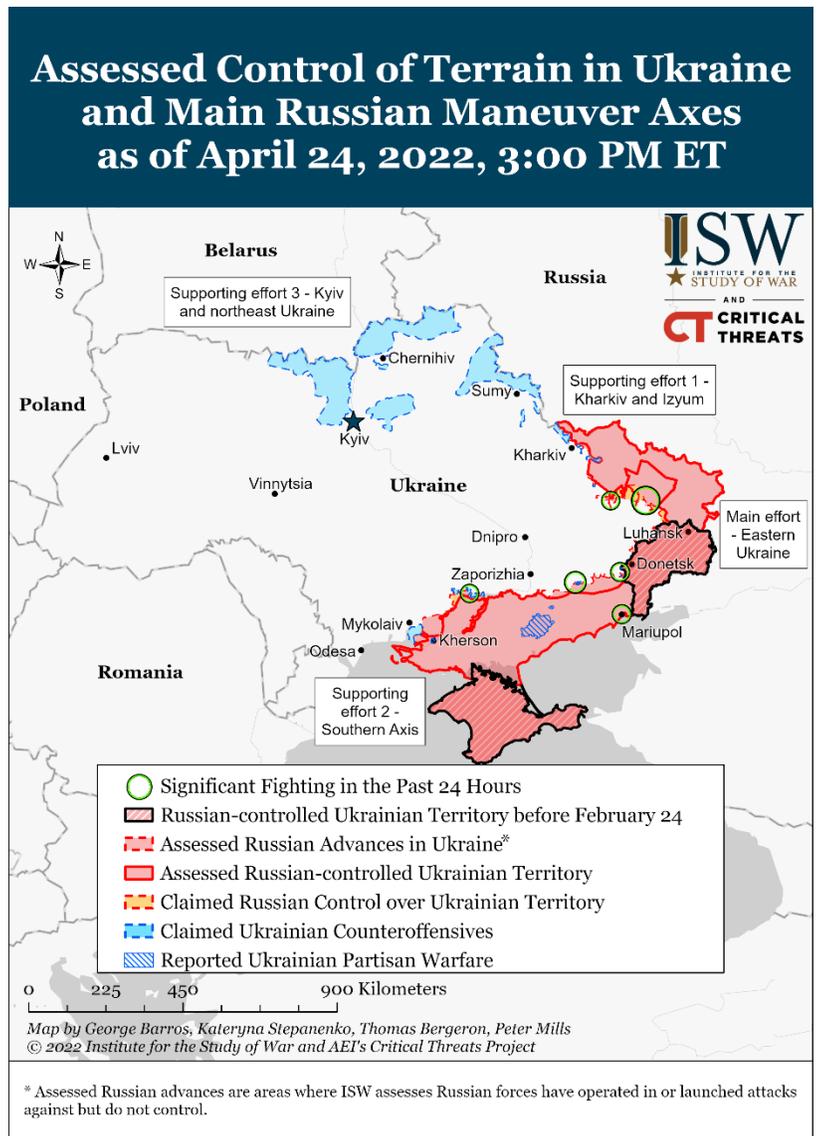
Additional Russian forces are deploying to reinforce unsuccessful attacks on the Izyum front.

Ukrainian civilians in occupied Kharkiv Oblast are reportedly organizing volunteer movements to resist Russian occupation measures, similar to previously documented actions in southern Ukraine.

Subordinate Main Effort—Mariupol - Russian forces continued to bombard Ukrainian defenders in the Azovstal Steel Plant with artillery and air strikes and may be preparing for renewed assaults on the facility. The deputy commander of the Azov Regiment stated on April 24 that Russian Naval Infantry are preparing to launch an assault on Azovstal, and Ukrainian Presidential Adviser Oleksiy Arestovych similarly stated Russian forces are concentrating around Azovstal for an assault.

Subordinate Main Effort—Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts - Russian forces conducted several attacks around Severodonetsk, Popasna, and Marinka on April 24, securing limited gains.

Supporting Effort #1—Kharkiv and Izyum - Ukrainian forces repelled limited Russian attacks from Izyum toward Slovyansk and Kramatorsk in the past 24 hours. Russian forces maintained their positions around Kharkiv city and continued to shell the surrounding area on April 24 and conducted remote mining in Korotichi (a western suburb of Kharkiv) to disrupt Ukrainian movements.



Supporting Effort #2—Southern Axis - There was no significant change in this area in the past 24 hours. Localized fighting continued in northern Kherson Oblast and west of Kherson city, but Russian forces did not launch any major attacks.

Supporting Effort #3—Sumy and Northeastern Ukraine - There was no significant change in this area in the past 24 hours.

Casualties - As of Sunday, Russia has so far lost 21,800 soldiers in their ongoing invasion, as well as 191 drones, 147 MLRSs, 69 air defense systems, 408 artillery pieces, 873 tanks, 154 helicopters, 179 aircraft, 2,238 armored vehicles, eight ships, 76 fuel trucks and 1,557 other vehicles, according to the General Staff of the Ukrainian Armed Forces.

February 24th - At the onset of the invasion, estimates put the Russians force at approximately 170,000 troops in 120 Battalion Groups, each with 10 tanks, 30 APCs and artillery, tallying 1,200 tanks and 3,000 APCs and armored vehicles.

It is estimated that Russia has lost more than 15% of its troops, seen over 45% injured, lost 73% of its tanks and 70% of its armored vehicles.

Increased Russian presence in Belgorod - Russia has deployed Iskander-M mobile battlefield missile launchers within 60 km (40 miles) of the Ukrainian border, the General Staff of Ukraine's Armed Forces said on Sunday.

The Iskander, a mobile ballistic missile system codenamed SS-26 Stone by NATO, replaced the Soviet Scud missile. Its two guided missiles have a range of up to 500 km (300 miles) and can carry conventional or nuclear warheads.

This is an ominous sign as it indicates Russia is increasing its long-range artillery capability to fire into Ukraine from within Russia itself. This will invite Ukrainian response, the nature of which remains to be seen.

The impact of this new move may well be an escalation in the type of weaponry provided to Ukraine. In open terrain mass tank and bombardments, range is vital to success. These Iskander weapons will outrange Ukrainian artillery, meaning either higher grade artillery will need to be supplied or oxidized charges like red oxide will need to be added to propellants in order to increase range.

In the 1980's South Africa found its G5 and G6 155mm howitzers were being outranged by new Russian artillery in Angolan battles. They introduced red oxide supplements to the propellant being used, which boosted the range to 53 kms, effectively outgunning the new Russian hardware.

Something will need to be done to counter the Iskander missile ability.

Putin hunts SAS in Ukraine: Russia launches formal probe into whether British elite troops 'specialising in sabotage and guerrilla warfare' are on the ground in Lviv.

Putin is searching for at least two SAS squads he believes may have been deployed to Lviv. Moscow State Media claimed in reports the British special forces work in war zones undercover as medics. Warring Putin's investigation is reported to be based on some allegations made by captured Kyiv soldiers

Russia scared?

Russia running scared II? Yesterday we spoke to the apparent Russian fear of direct military contact with Ukrainian fighting divisions. Today we expand on that fear.

Their fear extends further than close combat with Ukrainian forces. Russian command and Putin know that their actions in invading Ukraine are not only indefensible, but also illegal within Russia's own constitution.

Per the Russian constitution, Russia is not allowed to go to "war" unless it is itself first invaded. It cannot invade another country and call this a "war". It is illegal (in Russia) to do so, and Putin knows this.

To contain and hide what he is doing, he has outlawed use of the term "war" by any Russian, in any form or channel.

Any person mentioning that Russia is at war is subject to a penalty of up to 15 years in jail. Murder in Russia normally sees an 8-year sentence. This illustrates his fear of the Russian people becoming aware of what he is doing.

He has blocked airwave and social coverage of where he is, what he is doing and the damage Russia is causing. Why? because pictures and coverage will alert the Russia people at large of what he is up to. That he is engaged in "war".

Bodies then started coming home and the cruiser Mokba was sunk. He called the cause of the Mokba sinking a "fire," and issues statements that the US and NATO are committing atrocities and using chemical weapons in a Ukraine that is suppressing Russian-speaking compatriots, that he has to rescue them from genocide.

This is to deny to the Russian people that he is at war and simultaneously create plausible denial for Russian actions and carnage across Ukraine.

The Russians have and continue to commit atrocities, with evidence forthcoming of chemical weapon usage and ethnic cleansing underway. He is deporting captured Ukrainians into the furthest corners of Russia.

He is fearful that the Russian-speaking people of the Donbas will not side with him, that he did not liberate them as claimed. He is set on holding a referendum to ask the Donbas population whether they want to become Russian.

An effective way to ensure a positive "Russian" vote is to ensure that only people who do favor becoming Russian are present and can vote.

So he has deported those that he believes will not support his referendum to Russia provinces far removed from their homes. This is happening all across the Donbas.

Although not in the Donbas, but indicative of original intentions, North of Kyiv are cities that are empty of people and stripped of all possessions and valuables. Buildings have been destroyed and all semblance of Ukrainian authority and management eradicated.

This is consistent with earlier Putin statements there is "no Ukraine" and there are "no Ukrainian people". Genocide in short.

Putin is scared. Scared of direct military confrontation with Ukrainian units, scared of calling it a "war", scared that the Russian people will find out what they are doing and scared of what the world at large will do when they come across atrocities.

Russia is scared.

Sanctions

Russian official admits sanctions are crippling the economy as the country grapples with a selloff and mass shortages. The ruble may not be showing it, but Western economic sanctions imposed against Russia are working.

In revealing testimony before the Duma parliament, the head of the Central Bank of Russia (CBR) told the country's lawmakers she had to throw everything, but the kitchen sink just to prevent a full-blown run on the banking system.

"The sanctions imposed against Russia affected the situation in the financial sector, spurred the demand for foreign currencies, and caused fire sales of financial assets, a cash outflow from banks, and surging demand for goods," said Elvira Nabiullina in prepared remarks first published in English on Friday.

The frank assessment of Russia's economic problems contrasts sharply with political attacks launched against the current U.S. administration for a sanctions policy that failed to force Vladimir Putin to the negotiating table.

Presenting the CBR's annual report to parliament this week, Nabiullina painted a picture to lawmakers of just how grim the situation was that confronted her. Depositors withdrew 2.4 trillion rubles in the first weeks after the war broke out, eating up a year's worth of bank profits and a third of its accumulated capital cushion.

Without the imposition of strict capital controls, there would have been "a series of defaults and a domino effect" throughout the financial system, she argued. It doesn't end there, either, not by a long shot, as businesses have flashbacks to what it was like when the coronavirus pandemic hit.

"Loan repayment holidays were resumed. Currently the demand for them is comparable with the first month [of] the 2020 lockdown."

"The sanctions have affected the financial market, but now they will start to impact the real economy increasingly more significantly," the governor said. (AON).

Humanitarian

Russia wants to force Ukrainian POWs to donate blood – Today Russia proposed the forced donation of blood by captured Ukrainian soldiers, according to Ukrainian ombudswoman for Human Rights, Lyudmila Denisova, on Facebook.

Mariupol humanitarian corridor fails - No humanitarian routes were established out of the southeastern Ukrainian port city of Mariupol on Sunday, Ukraine's Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk said, blaming Russian forces for not holding their fire.

Mariupol - Ukrainian President Zelenskyy said new evidence is emerging that shows Russian troops killed tens of thousands of civilians in Mariupol and then tried to cover it up. He said Ukraine has intercepted Russian conversations about "how they are concealing the traces of their crimes." Satellite images have shown what appear to be mass graves dug in towns to the west and east of Mariupol.

Zelenskyy said the Russians set up "filtration camps" near Mariupol for those trying to leave the city, which has largely been reduced to rubble. He said those who survive these camps are sent to areas under Russian occupation or to Russia itself, often as far as Siberia or the Far East. Many of them, he said, are children.

Bomb-sniffing dog 'Patron' becomes Ukrainian hero

- Two-year-old Jack Russell Terrier, whose name means 'bullet' in Ukrainian, has helped clear some 90 explosives in Chernihiv, authorities say.

A two-year-old Jack Russell Terrier named Patron, who works to sniff out dangerous explosives in Ukraine, has



become an internet celebrity in the war-torn country and around the world.

Patron — Ukrainian for “bullet cartridge” — has helped clear some 90 explosive devices with the Chernihiv branch of the State Emergency Service of Ukraine (SES), officials said.

The northern Ukrainian city of Chernihiv was under siege by Russian forces for over a month since the Russian invasion of Ukraine started on February 24. The Russian army pummeled the city’s residents with air raids and strikes, before withdrawing in early April.

Ukraine a “Vital Interest”

Ukraine straddles east and west and the scene of multiple historical battles and quests for power and influence. Any regime, power or alliance seeking an “east-west” bridge in Europe, has to have Ukraine and Belarus under their command and control.

It is the vital “European breadbasket” with a huge mineral wealth advantage. The primary strategic and tactical objective is to control the territory for without it, any quest for European control is extremely limited.

It is of vital strategic and geopolitical import and interest to the US, EU and NATO that Ukraine does not fall into the Russian orbit – at all costs.

Strategically, should Ukraine fall, and Belarus remain under Russian control, and Russia consolidate with China with the latter extending influence in the ASEAN, African and South American zones, then they will succeed in forming their desired “alternative geopolitical universe.

Global control and history changes, with a competing currency, alternative systems to SWIFT, IMF and World Bank and creation of a parallel global network and customer base with incredible mineral, food and water assets.

Consider also;

Arctic - The Arctic is abundant with resources and possesses strategic sea routes. China has no Arctic frontage but has called itself “Near Arctic” in order to try and muscle into the strategic debate.

Russia has 56 nuclear-powered icebreakers in the Arctic, more than the rest of the world combined. They have another 11 on order and are establishing bases across the region.

Russia - If Russia fails and its economy suffers for twenty to thirty years, it will “miss the global boat,” and be vulnerable. China, and to a smaller degree BRICS, will step in and strategically “rescue” Russia by buying its assets, oil, mineral, agricultural and manufacturing capabilities, global access and military prowess together with a strategic alliance of nuclear technology and weapons.

SEATO - Geopolitically, this brings into play the South China Sea, South Korea, Japan, Australia and New Zealand. Malaysia yesterday announced it was scrutinizing the Russian financial messaging system and Indonesia, a predominantly Muslim nation of 273 million people, is inching towards a China-friendly status, despite warring with them over territorial fishing rights in the South China Sea.

SEATO – **S**outheast **A**sia **T**reaty **O**rganization – signed in Manila on September 8, 1954, by Australia, France, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand, the United Kingdom, and the United States, and the Atlantic anti-communist partner of NATO, formally ended on June 30, 1977.

QUAD - Known as the 'Quadrilateral Security Dialogue' (QSD), is an informal strategic forum comprising four nations, US, India, Australia and Japan. One of the primary objectives of the Quad was to work for a free, open, prosperous and

inclusive Indo-Pacific region. Quad first met in 2007 but has been dormant for many years. Recently there has been a rustling of interest, but this remains to be seen.

India, a member of both QUAD and BRICS, is seeing increasing influence because of its strategic location and population. The UK, EU and the US have been calling to see Prime Minister Modi over the past few weeks to see whether they can wean Modi away from a Russian partnership. The Chinese element remains to be seen as it has distinct desires along the Indian/Chinese border. Wars frequently break out and have done so over recent years.

Pakistan - Pakistan's removal of Prime Minister Imran Khan comes into play, stating that he believes this was a western-inspired move. Pakistan plays an important role in the Chinese BRI network

BRI – China's **Belt Road Initiative** is a multi-trillion dollar initiative straddling the globe, creating networks, alliances and bases around the world for Chinese advantage. All BRI Agreements are bi-lateral as opposed to multi-lateral, which sees China engage countries individually without fear of multi-state alliances forming to circumvent its control.

Middle East – Saudi Arabia is moving closer to China and Russia, contemplating trade in rubles and yuan. The Middle Eastern states are rich in oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG) resources. With 40% of China's oil imports coming from the Middle East it has surpassed the US to become the world's largest crude oil importer.

In 2016, when China's President Xi Jinping visited the Middle East, the CCP released China's "Arab Policy Paper," which highlighted the Chinese vision for the region by introducing the "1+2+3 cooperation pattern" in which energy security forms the core, investment and trade following, and developing nuclear energy coming later. In 2018, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Oman "were Beijing's second, fourth and fifth-largest crude oil suppliers."

As China needs Middle Eastern markets to export its manufactured goods, and in turn, the Middle Eastern states need China for oil exports, trade ties between them were growing steadily and in 2018, trade stood at \$244 billion.

Africa and South America – With roughly 2 billion people and a huge basin of agricultural and mineral wealth, these continents are warming to Russia and China, both of whom have been investing there for decades.

MENA – With China's BRI interests in the Middle East, it has signed BRI agreements with 21 states of the **Middle East** and **North Africa** region, including 18 Arab states.

Geopolitical slanting - Should China succeed in melding these and other events and developments into a solid state of affairs, it creates a global mega-system controlled by itself. Russia is still there but subservient to a new master.

Ukraine is the domino that needs to fall for Russia - and China. Belarus has already fallen.

NATO, EU, SEATO and the US will not allow this.

Now one can see that Ukraine is more important than just Ukraine.

Impacts

Europe facing unprovoked attack by Russia against Ukraine – European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has said that letting the Russian aggression in Ukraine go unchallenged could lead to a world where "might makes right," including in the Indo-Pacific, where there are "simmering tensions."

In an interview ahead of her arrival in India on Sunday for a two-day visit, Ursula von der Leyen said she will discuss the Ukraine crisis with the Indian side with a call for collective action to "stop this aggression now." The European Union (EU), she said, will work with friends and partners, notably India, to ensure the security and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific region.

The Coming Russian Struggle for New Markets for Its Oil - So far, there has been little obvious impact on the volume of crude flowing from Russia's export terminals. While seaborne shipments drifted lower during the first weeks after Russia's invasion, there was no sudden collapse. And the rate of exports surged in the first week of April, due in part to the easing of storms in the Black Sea, which had led to a backlog of ships waiting to load at a key port.

Russia can increase domestic energy consumption and boost exports to new markets after some "unfriendly" countries have rejected Russian oil. So says Putin. It sounds simple, but it's going to be a lot tougher in practice once the next wave of restrictions on Moscow's oil trade kicks in.

What has changed, though, is where a lot of those ships are going. There has been a big jump in the number of cargoes heading for Asia from ports in the Black Sea, the Baltic and even, in one case, from the Arctic port of Murmansk. Flows of crude to Asian countries from Russia's western ports have surged from zero in the weeks prior to the invasion to 875,000 barrels a day in the first full week of April.

While Russian oil companies had to offer steep discounts of more than \$30 a barrel to sell crude into Europe, they weren't offering the same price cuts to buyers in India. That's likely to change, though, as state-run oil refiners switch to privately negotiated deals in the hunt for better terms, instead of buying through public tenders.

But there's likely to be a limit to how much India's refiners will buy from Russia. Increased imports of Russian crude will displace purchases from elsewhere and buyers will likely be wary of damaging relations with their traditional suppliers in the Middle East. That may put a cap on the volume they are prepared to take from Russia. (Bloomberg).

Ukrainian rail - Poland and Ukraine have signed an agreement increasing cooperation in the railway transport sector, aiming to help Ukraine maintain its trade exchange with foreign countries as the Russian invasion affects its ports.

Leading Strategist Questions Russian Forces' Ability To 'Act Like A Western Army' - The Ukraine conflict has punctured Western perceptions of a mighty Russian Army since President Vladimir Putin seized Crimea eight years ago, and the Russian leader's refusal to let his invading army "reset and reform" is "good news for Ukraine and good news for the West," according to a former U.S. naval commander who heads a prominent strategic think tank.

But James Foggo III, a retired U.S. Navy admiral who heads the Virginia-based Center for Maritime Strategy, also said the "ugly" conflict has underscored a "trust gap" between the warring sides and he can't easily envisage Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy sitting down to peace negotiations.

"I don't know how Ukraine gets out of this other than to defeat Russia, and that's a wild card that's up in the air right now," he told RFE/RL's Georgian Service in a recent interview. "You know, if the Russians continue to be beaten, then eventually, public opinion will catch up with Vladimir Putin."

Foggo offered a damning assessment of Russian military performance so far across all four axes of its initial full-scale attack on Ukraine, adding that "they ran out of fuel, they ran out of food, didn't have sustainment of ammunition, and they got hit pretty hard, particularly in the battle [for] Kyiv."



"If they take Mariupol, then with the other territory they've taken, they have built this coveted land bridge that they want down to the Black Sea -- a bridge across the Sea of Azov to connect Crimea with Mother Russia," said Foggo, speaking days before news of the Mariupol pivot.

Russia Warns Greece of Complete Breakdown in Relations - Russia's Foreign Ministry warned Greece that relations between the two nations that "share the same faith" have been "reduced to almost nothing."

Maria Zakharova, director of the Information and Press Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, warned in a statement released on social media that the "historical parallels" between Greece and Russia were in danger of becoming "a solid double line between us."

The Russian official focused on Greece's decision to declare 12 Russian officials "personae non-grata," on April 6 joining other European states that had taken similar steps in response to accusations of atrocities committed by Russian forces against civilians in Ukraine.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has caused a rupture in the global order that is probably beyond repair - Bank of Canada governor Tiff Macklem, who helped establish the G20 as the locus of economic co-ordination in the aftermath of the Great Recession, said Russia's invasion of Ukraine has caused a rupture in the global order that probably is beyond repair.

"You are seeing a shift here," said Macklem, who was among the officials who left the room when their Russian counterpart began his remarks at a gathering of G20 finance ministers and central bankers this week in Washington. "It is a bit difficult to predict where it goes," he added, and then struggled to find a way to articulate what the new order might look like. "Let me put it this way. We talk about open trade. We are going to be talking about open and secure trade now."

That's not the kind of trade Macklem was talking about in 2008 and 2009, when he was advising former prime minister Stephen Harper's government on how to confront the financial crisis as the top economic diplomat at the Finance Department.

Macklem keeps a photo that was taken at the meeting in Washington in October 2008 when the G7 legacy powers realized they had lost their grip on the global financial system and would need the help of emerging powers such as China and Russia to help them reverse the crisis that bankers in New York and London had created.

Containment

Belarus Rail Workers Sabotage Russia's Attack on Ukraine - Rail workers in Belarus risked their lives by sabotaging Russian supply lines. Their example shows a way forward to building a working-class response to the war, one that is independent of both Russia and NATO.

From the beginning of the Russian invasion, Belarusian rail workers have sabotaged signaling equipment and circuits on the country's railroads. In addition, Belarusian hackers launched cyberattacks on the central control systems.

Our Common Heritage

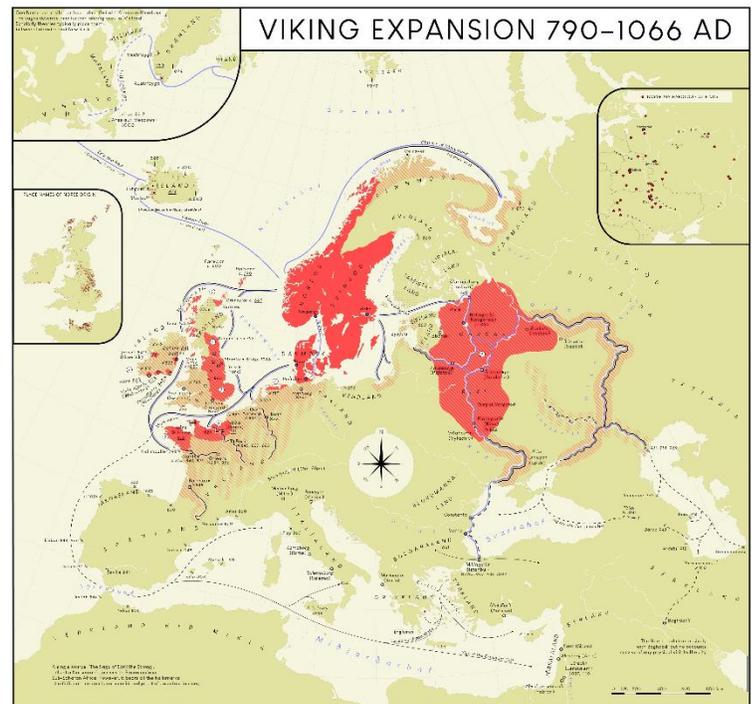
The Vikings invaded neighboring European lands many centuries ago, settling and becoming “local” as history carried on. These settled lands include France, UK, Ireland – and Russia. They gave Russia its name – calling the people the “Rus.”

Coming from common origins, Viking blood and genes spread across England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, France and what is today called Russia.

As the centuries wore on, those settled folk in France and the UK migrated to North and South America, Southern Italy, Africa, Australia and New Zealand.

Today our genes are linked through this common heritage as can be seen from the adjoining map of Viking expansion in the years from 790AD, shown in the red zones across the continent.

Brothers and sisters of distant mothers and fathers, we have taken distinctly different paths and cultures.



Widening of conflict and war

Moldova expresses "deep concern" over Russian general's Transnistria comments - Moldova's Foreign Ministry summoned Russia's ambassador to the country on Friday to express "deep concern" over recent comments made by a Russian general that suggested the Kremlin is targeting its territory.

Why it matters - Maj. Gen. Rustam Minnekayev said Friday that Russia seeks full control of southern Ukraine to give it another "another way out to Transnistria," referring to the unrecognized breakaway state internationally recognized as part of Moldova.

Minnekayev also claimed that the Moldovan government was oppressing the Russian-speaking population in Transnistria, echoing a claim that the Kremlin has used in its attempt to justify its unprovoked invasion of Ukraine.