

Conflict Update # 355

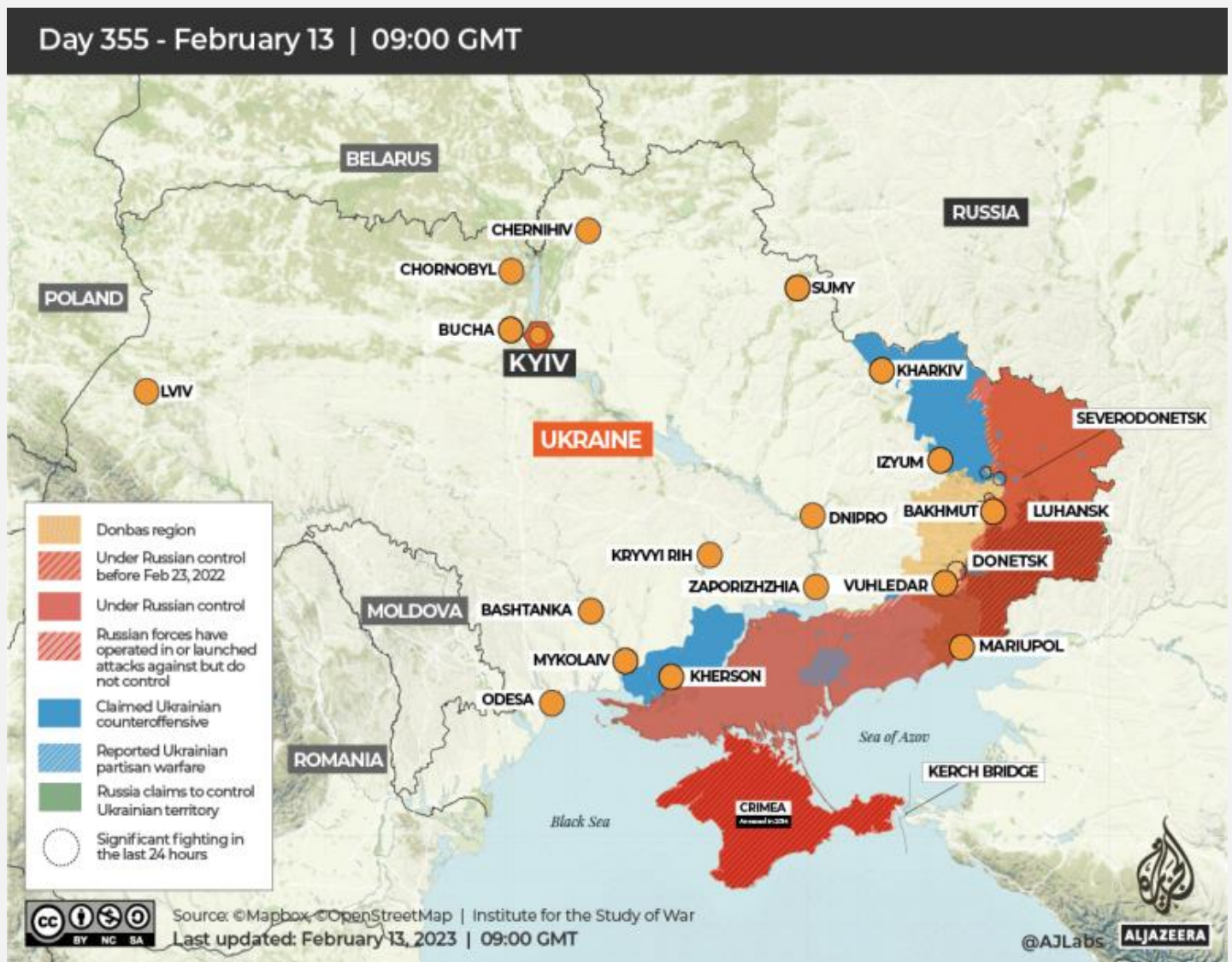
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Conflict Assessment

Russian losses – 138,340 (560) soldiers killed, 3,283 (+3) enemy tanks, 6,492 (+4) armored combat vehicles, 2,290 (+3) artillery systems, 465 (+0) MLRS systems, 234 (+0) air defense systems, 296 (+0) warplanes, 286 (+0) helicopters, 2,007 (+0) UAVs of the operational-tactical level, 857 (+0) cruise missiles, 18 (+0) warships/cutters, 5,150 (+2) trucks and tankers, 4 Iskander Missile Launchers (+0), 239 fuel bowsers (+0) and 217 (+2) units of equipment.

Key Takeaways



Russia's defence ministry says Moscow's troops have pushed forward a few kilometres along the front lines in Ukraine - The ministry said Russian forces had managed to advance two kilometres (1.2 miles) to the west in

four days. However, it did not say along which part of the long front line, encompassing several Ukrainian regions in the country's south and east, they had moved.

"Russian servicemen broke the enemy's resistance and advanced several kilometres deeper into its echeloned defence," it said.

Meanwhile, the Ukrainian military said its forces had repelled Russian attacks in the country's Donetsk, Kharkiv, Luhansk and Zaporizhia regions.

'Like turkeys at a shooting range': Mauling of Russian forces in Donetsk hotspot may signal problems to come - The scenes are chaotic: Russian tanks veering wildly before exploding or driving straight into minefields, men running in every direction, some on fire, the bodies of soldiers caught in tank tracks.

Russian military bloggers are calling it a fiasco, and worse.

These scenes have been recorded by Ukrainian military drones over the past two weeks around the town of Vuhledar in Donetsk, eastern Ukraine, where successive Russian assaults have failed.

The Vuhledar debacle suggests chronic failures in the command and tactics of the Russians as they gear up for a spring offensive. If replicated elsewhere on the long military front in Donetsk and Luhansk, such failings could jeopardize the Kremlin's plans to seize more territory.

About 20 videos geolocated by CNN show basic tactical blunders in an area that's open and flat, where Ukrainian spotters on higher ground can direct artillery strikes and where minefields are worsening Russian casualties.

Satellite imagery showed craters left by heavy artillery shelling around Vuhledar. - Maxar Technologies

One video shows a tank running into a minefield and exploding, followed almost obliviously by an infantry fighting vehicle that suffers the same fate. Others show Ukrainian drones dropping small explosive charges on static tanks in open country – and a graveyard of abandoned armor.

The Russian MoD insisted the assault on Vuhledar, where the 155th Marine Brigade is prominently involved, is going according to plan. In remarks recorded for a Sunday television show, Putin said that the "marine infantry is working as it should. Right now. Fighting heroically."

But the leader of the self-declared, Russian-backed Donetsk People's Republic (DPR), Denis Pushilin, acknowledged Friday that the area was "hot" and said "the enemy continues to transfer reserves in large quantities, and this slowed down the liberation of this settlement."

The commanding officer, Colonel Sergey Polyakov, a Special Forces specialist, was also killed during the Ukrainian defense against the Russian assault.

Washington-based Institute for the Study of War (ISW) says poor leadership is only part of the problem: the "highly dysfunctional tactics are far more indicative of the fact that the 155th Naval Infantry Brigade is likely comprised of poorly trained mobilized personnel than of poor command."

The UK MoD reported yesterday that an uptick in Russian casualties in places like Vuhledar "is likely due to a range of factors including lack of trained personnel, coordination, and resources across the front."

Ukrainian military officials say there is a random mix of Russian forces in the Vuhledar area, including professional units, the recently mobilized, militia of the DPR and infantry of a private military company called Patriot, which is said to be close to the Russian defense ministry.

‘We’re literally being sent to slaughter’ — mobilised soldiers from Russia’s Kaliningrad region record video message pleading for help from their governor - Mobilized servicemen from Russia’s Kaliningrad region have recorded a video message to their governor Anton Alikhanov asking for help. The video was posted on Russian social media platform VKontakte, in a group titled PobedaZAnami_39.

The video features 12 men wearing balaclavas, some in military uniforms. Only one of the men is speaking. According to that person, the people in the video are “residents of the Kaliningrad region” mobilized in October of last year.

The man says that after being mobilized they all became members of territorial defence of the region and partook in “guarding particularly important facilities”. On the fifth (he does not say of what month), they had been deployed to Rostov, after which they ended up in Donetsk commanded by forces of the self-proclaimed Donetsk “people’s republic;” their battalion was renamed to an “infantry” one and they were ordered to “complete assault missions.”

“We’re not refusing to carry out the assigned tasks, but we’re not trained for assault. Our battalion has already suffered losses. Our commanders are far away, there’s almost no communication. <...> We’re literally being sent to slaughter,” the man in the video claims.

A comment from the official account of the Kaliningrad region later appeared under the video. “Hello! We’re aware of the video message, we’re looking into it. Thank you,” it says.

NATO says new Russian offensive has started - NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg says Russia’s feared new offensive in Ukraine has started and Moscow has dispatched more troops and weapons for its war effort.

“We see no sign whatsoever that Putin is preparing for peace. ... What we see is Putin and Russia still wanting to control Ukraine,” Jens Stoltenberg told reporters at a news conference in Brussels.

“We see how they are sending more troops, more weapons, more capabilities,” he said. “The reality is that we are seeing the start [of a new offensive] already.”

Stoltenberg also said he expected the issue of fighter jets to be discussed at a two-day meeting of NATO defence ministers that starts on Tuesday.

Ukraine’s new anti-tank tactic: lay a minefield, then scatter more mines from the air - There are indications the Ukrainians have adopted a clever new method of laying mines. Ukrainian gunners wait until Russian troops clear a path through an old minefield--then toss fresh mines onto that same path right as the Russians are crossing.

France ‘strongly’ advises nationals against going to Belarus: Report - France’s foreign affairs ministry has “strongly” advised French nationals against going to Belarus given the “new offensive launched by Russia in Ukraine,” the Reuters news agency reports.

Earlier today, the US told its citizens to leave Russia immediately due to the war in Ukraine and what it said was the risk of arbitrary arrest or harassment by Russian law enforcement agencies.

Russian suicide drone boat strikes Ukrainian bridge - Russian forces appear to have used an unmanned surface vessel (USV) to attack a strategic bridge between Ukraine and Moldova, according to social media reports and defense analysts. It represents the first known Russian use of a USV in combat, though not the first use in the Black Sea.

The Zatoka road and rail bridge connects the Ukrainian port of Odessa with Moldova. It is the only road and rail link between the two nations. The bridge was hit previously by a Russian cruise missile strike in 2022, and photos from the

missile attack have circulated again on social media, purporting to show the aftermath of Friday's drone strike. The extent of any damage from the drone boat attack was not immediately clear.

Diplomacy

Meeting - US defence secretary, Lloyd Austin, and Ukrainian defence minister, Oleksii Reznikov, discussed priorities, including air defence and artillery, for upcoming meetings of Kyiv's allies in Brussels.

Olympics - Russian Sports Minister Oleg Matytsin said calls from more than 30 countries to ban Russian and Belarusian athletes from the 2024 Olympics were unacceptable, TASS news agency reported.

International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach said his organisation is not on the wrong side of history after opening the door for Russian and Belarusian athletes to participate in next year's Summer Games in Paris.

Nord Stream - NATO should hold an emergency meeting to discuss recent findings about September explosions at the Nord Stream gas pipelines, Russia's foreign ministry spokeswoman said late on Saturday.

Warning to China: U.S. Navy has aircraft carrier in South China Sea - A day after Chinese media mocked the Biden administration for pitting fighter jets against a surveillance balloon and other unknown "objects," a United States Navy carrier strike group was deployed back to the international waters of the South China Sea.

The Nimitz Carrier Strike Group (NIMCSG) and Makin Island Amphibious Ready Group (MK ARG), with the 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit (13th MEU), began integrated expeditionary strike force (ESF) operations in the neutral waters that area claimed by Beijing as sovereign territory.

Turn up the heat on Putin — and show him he can't defeat Ukraine - In the Ukraine war, the US has developed a novel strategy: boiling the frog. If Putin feels the full brunt of Western capabilities at once, the thinking goes, he may react unpredictably. If, however, the West turns up the heat slowly — by spacing out the delivery of key weapons and restricting their use — Putin will accept each incremental increase. One day, he'll wake to find it's too late. He's already cooked.

But this strategy prolongs the war. It ties Ukraine's hands, preventing it from exploiting Russian vulnerabilities in a timely manner. While Ukraine pays in blood, Putin has time to regroup and revise his strategy to account for whatever new weapons Ukraine has received that month.

The supply of battle tanks is a case in point. For months supporters of Ukraine issued calls to supply it with tanks, which the Biden administration rejected.

The White House reversed course when it became obvious Putin was prepping the battlefield for a new offensive, strengthening his lines and pummeling Ukrainian positions with artillery barrages. By the time Western tanks finally arrive on the battlefield, the offensive will already be underway and launched from newly fortified positions.

The Biden administration has exercised such caution because it worries about triggering a nuclear war. But this telegraphing of fear signals to Putin that the mere threat of nuclear escalation will wring concessions from the West. By rewarding nuclear brinkmanship, the Biden team is increasing, not decreasing, the odds of escalation.

Indeed, a close examination of Putin's saber-rattling reveals that it comes not in response to setbacks on the battlefield but to expressions by US leaders of reluctance to support Ukraine's war aims. Putin is not suicidal. He has remained at the helm for over two decades, in part due to his respect for the logic of deterrence. Unable to take even the Donbas after a year of combat operations, he knows his degraded military is no match for the US and NATO. He has no intention of going to war with the West.

Vladimir Lenin supposedly said, "Probe with bayonets. If you find mush, you proceed. If you find steel, you withdraw." Putin has yet to find steel in the American position.

A policy aimed at victory would provide Ukraine with access to advanced unmanned aerial vehicles, fighter jets and long-range systems like the Army Tactical Missile System that can hold Russian supply chains at risk, including inside Russia proper, and shorten the war.

Undoubtedly, Putin would look at such a development with frustration, even anger. But with the US committed to Ukraine's victory, no amount of cunning or bluster could arrest the collapse of his imperial project.

The boiled frog strategy assumes that Putin will wake up, realize that the cost of the war is too great to bear and sue for peace. But the only way to bring him to his senses is to turn up the heat.

Article in the NY Post by Peter Rough, Director of the Center on Europe and Eurasia at Hudson Institute in Washington, DC.

Russian Red Sea naval base

Sudan military finishes review of Russian Red Sea naval base deal - Sudan's ruling military concluded a review of an agreement with Russia to build a navy base on the Red Sea in the African country, two Sudanese officials said Saturday.

They said the deal was awaiting the formation of a civilian government and a legislative body to be ratified before it takes effect. The officials said Moscow met Sudan's demands, including providing more weapons and equipment.

"They cleared all our concerns. The deal has become OK from the military side," one official said.

The officials did not provide further details and spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations. A spokesman for the Sudanese military declined to comment.

Russian FM Lavrov also said the deal still needs ratification by Sudan's yet-to-be-formed legislative body.

The agreement allows Russia to set up a naval base with up to 300 Russian troops, and to simultaneously keep up to four navy ships, including nuclear-powered ones, in the strategic Port Sudan on the Red Sea.

In exchange, Russia is to provide Sudan with weapons and military equipment. The agreement is to last for 25 years, with automatic extensions for 10-year periods if neither side objects.

China already shares a naval base in Djibouti at the entrance to the Red Sea and Suez Canal.



Russia engaging in a similar exercise in mid-Red Sea territory and directly across the channel from Saudi Arabia is cause for strategic concern.

Russia presently has a naval facility in Tartus, Syria, straddling the Suez Canal northern entrance pathway.

19,000 Ships transit the Suez Canal carrying approximately 12% of global trade and 30% of global container traffic, transporting over USD \$1 trillion worth of goods per annum.

Containment

British arms and military vehicles could be manufactured in Ukraine under license, easing the country's dependence on supplies of arms from Western allies, British newspaper The Telegraph reported.

Polish training of Ukrainian tank crews – Poland's president, Andrzej Duda, and defence minister, Mariusz Błaszczak, met Polish and foreign instructors intensively training Ukrainian troops to operate German-made Leopard 2 tanks. Duda and Błaszczak also watched Leopard 2 training at a military base and test range in Świętoszów, in south-west Poland, AP reports.

Ukrainian tank crews from units fighting in the east of the country are being trained up to 10 hours a day, including weekends, the Polish military said. Training is also being held in Germany.

Duda said he hoped the German-made tanks, which some European countries and Canada have offered Ukraine, would help Ukrainian forces "in a much efficient way to defeat the enemy."

He said the Ukrainian trainees have come straight from the frontline.

German training of Polish tank crews - Ukrainian forces began training on Monday in operating Leopard 2 tanks in Germany, in a programme that will last until the beginning of April. German defence minister Boris Pistorius has announced that the tanks should arrive in Ukraine by the end of March.

Comments, Developments and Reports

Ukraine plots post-war rebuilding effort with JPMorgan Chase as economic advisor - Ukraine's government signed an agreement with JPMorgan Chase to help advise the war-afflicted country on its economy and future rebuilding efforts.

Ukraine's Ministry of Economy signed a memorandum of understanding with a group of executives from the New York-based bank on Thursday aimed at rebuilding and developing the country, according to a statement from President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

Germany says Finland, Sweden NATO bids must be ratified without delay - German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock called on Turkey and Hungary to pave the way for Finland and Sweden to join NATO, stating she expects all NATO members to ratify their bids to join the defence alliance "without further delay."

The accession of the two countries would strengthen the alliance as a whole and the two should join together, Baerbock told a news conference in Helsinki with her Finnish counterpart, Pekka Haavisto.

Finland and Sweden sought membership after Russia's invasion of Ukraine last year and have said they want to join "hand in hand", but while most member states have given the applications the green light, Turkey and Hungary are yet to ratify them.

Ankara said this month it supported Finland's application but wants Stockholm in particular to take a tougher line against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which is considered a terrorist group by Turkey and the European Union, and another group it blames for a 2016 coup attempt.

Ukraine accuses Italy's Berlusconi of 'spreading Russian propaganda' - Ukraine has accused former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi of spreading Russian propaganda after he said all Zelenskyy had to do to prevent the war in Ukraine was to "stop attacking" territory held by Russia-backed separatists in the east.

In comments on Sunday, Berlusconi said he judged the Ukrainian president's behaviour "very, very negatively" and said that if he were still head of Italy's government, he would not seek a meeting with Zelenskyy.

"Berlusconi's ridiculous accusations against the Ukrainian president are an attempt to kiss Putin's hands, which are covered in blood up to the elbows," Oleg Nikolenko, a spokesman for Ukraine's foreign ministry, wrote on Facebook.

"At the same time, the Italian politician should understand that by spreading Russian propaganda, he encourages Russia to continue its crimes against Ukraine, and therefore, bears political and moral responsibility," he added.

Comment – My Italian ex-partner was a colleague of Berlusconi and spoke highly of him. Obviously has strange bedfellows.

Chinese ship accused of using 'military-grade laser' against Philippine vessel - Philippines coastguard says crew member temporarily blinded and mission disrupted in South China Sea.

The Philippines has accused a Chinese coastguard ship of directing a "military-grade laser light" at one of its vessels, temporarily blinding a crew member and disrupting a mission in the South China Sea.

The Chinese ship shone a green laser light twice towards the boat as it sought to deliberately block a resupply mission, the Philippine coastguard said. It also accused the Chinese vessel of making "dangerous manoeuvres by approaching about 150 yards from the vessel's starboard quarter".

A video issued by the Philippine coastguard showed a green laser-like beam of light emitting from a ship in the distance.

Moldovan president warns of Russian plot to topple leadership - Moldova's president accused Russia on Monday of planning to use foreign saboteurs to bring down her tiny country's leadership, stop it joining the European Union and use it in the war against Ukraine.

President Maia Sandu made her comments after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said last week his country had uncovered a Russian intelligence plan "for the destruction of Moldova", and days after the country's government resigned.

Sandu, whose country borders Ukraine, has repeatedly expressed concern about Moscow's intentions towards the former Soviet republic and about the presence of Russian troops in the breakaway Transnistria region.

Comment – Moldova has every right to be concerned as Russian strategic desires include Moldova as one of the European gateways to Russia by any opposing force. Putin wants to neutralize any and all such gateways, and Ukraine is but one of those, albeit with two openings to Russia, whilst Moldova is another. The third "flat" gateway being Belarus but Lukashenko is already in bed with the Kremlin leader.

Shock of war hits a world economy at the crossroads - A year of war in Ukraine has already made a dent in world prosperity. But its deeper impact will be felt in how the conflict plays into shifts that were already reshaping the global economy before Russia's tanks rolled in.

Most immediately, the war added new uncertainties to the economic trauma of a COVID-19 pandemic that had already led to record rises in public debt, inflation-fueled cost-of-living crises, and labor shortages in essential sectors.

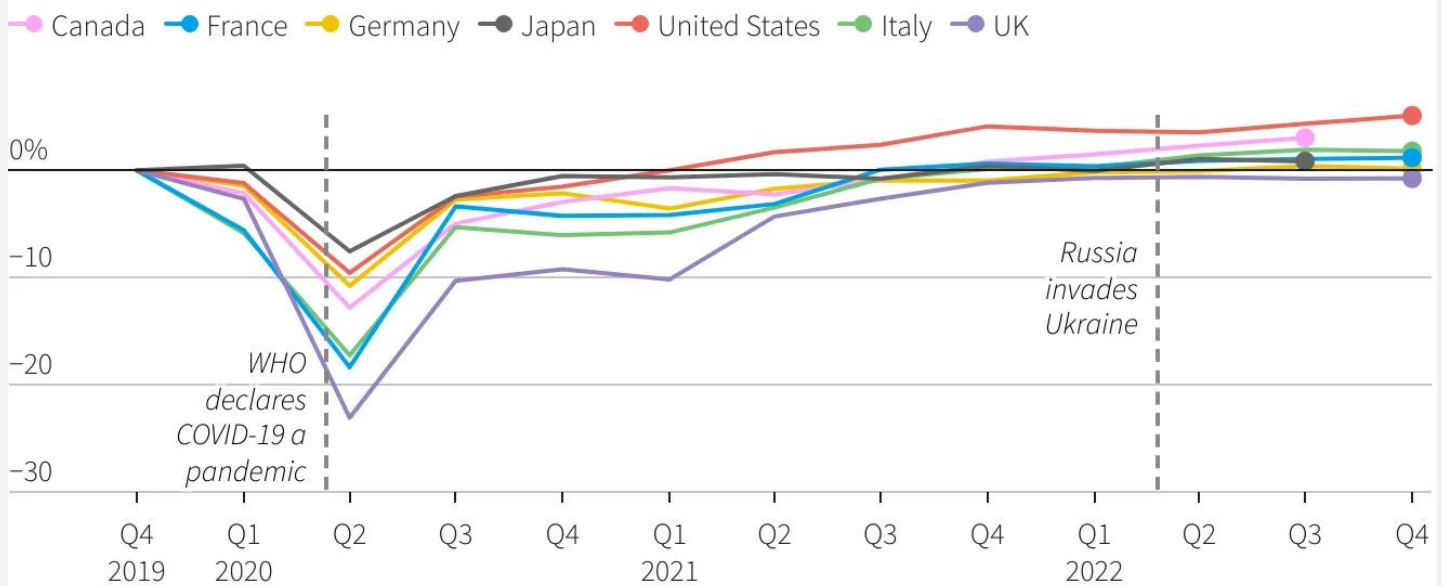
Economic sanctions on Moscow came as hurdles to world trade were mounting after an era of rapid globalization. Russia's weaponization of its gas and oil exports bolstered the case for an energy transition already made urgent by climate change.

"The shock of war on demand and prices has cascaded through the global economy and, in conjunction with COVID and other policy decisions, has created these headwinds to growth," said Robert Kahn, director of global macro-geo-economics at the Eurasia Group consultancy.

"And I think we are not done yet."

From COVID to conflict

Major economies' real GDP rebased to end-2019.



Source: Refinitiv Datastream | Reuters, Feb. 10, 2023 | By Vincent Flasseur

The war has devastated Ukraine's economy, shrinking it by a third, while sanctions are now starting to starve Russia of revenues from energy and other exports. But it is harder to quantify its impact on the rest of the world.

European neighbors have so far avoided the mass energy rationing and wave of bankruptcies that were feared, thanks to efforts to build up fuel stocks and rein in energy demand, and – not least – to an unusually mild winter.

Global food and energy prices were already surging as the world emerged from the pandemic lockdowns of 2020 and spiked higher after the outbreak of war, but many indices are now below their levels of a year ago.

"We find that energy prices increased more in 2021 than in 2022, suggesting that the war and the sanctions were not the most important drivers," analysts Zsolt Darvas and Catarina Martins found in a December study for European think tank Bruegel.

Putin & Russia

Moldova's president, Maia Sandu, has accused Russia of planning to use foreign saboteurs to overthrow her country's government, prevent it from joining the EU and use it in the war against Ukraine. Sandu's comments on Monday came after Ukraine's president, Zelenskyy, said last week that his country had intercepted plans by Russian secret services "for the destruction of Moldova" – claims that were later confirmed by Moldovan intelligence officials.

Kremlin moves to rein in Russian mercenary boss Prigozhin - His private army is pushing hard to give Russia a battlefield win in Ukraine, but mounting evidence suggests the Kremlin has moved to curb what it sees as the excessive political clout of Yevgeny Prigozhin, founder of Russia's Wagner mercenary group.

Prigozhin, a 61-year-old ex-convict, has grabbed headlines in recent months over his bloody role in Ukraine and is sometimes portrayed in the West as a real-life James Bond villain.

Shaven-headed and fond of coarse language, he has made a splash in Russian-language media too where he has reveled in being sanctioned by the West, publicly insulted Russia's top military brass, tried to parlay battlefield success into Kremlin favour, and detailed his recruitment of tens of thousands of convicts for his private army.

His profile became so prominent that allies and analysts began speculating he was angling for an official job or career in politics. There is growing evidence now though that the Kremlin has moved to nip such speculation in the bud, ordering Prigozhin to halt his public criticism of the defence ministry while advising state media to stop mentioning him or Wagner by name.

Prigozhin confirmed last week he had also been stripped of the right to recruit convicts from prisons - a key pillar of his nascent political influence and one which has helped his forces make small but steady gains in eastern Ukraine where they appear to be inching closer to capturing the city of Bakhmut.

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It's High Time to Decolonize Western Russia Studies - Why has it taken a war of conquest for experts to recognize Russia's nature as a vast imperial enterprise?

As a fact of history and problem of contemporary geopolitics, Russia's nature as an imperial power is incontrovertible. After World War I, the Russian Empire avoided the permanent dismemberment that befell other multi-ethnic land empires, such as the Ottoman Empire and Austria-Hungary. The Soviet Union not only reconquered most of the non-Russian lands that had declared independence from Moscow in the wake of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution (including Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan)—but even expanded the empire in the course of World War II, annexing Moldova, the western part of Ukraine, and other lands. Nor did the Soviet Union participate in the decolonization era. Even as the French and British empires were being dissolved, the Soviet Union was expanding its colonial reach, tightening its grip deep into Eastern and Central Europe with bloody crackdowns and military actions.



Shortly after the breakup of the Soviet Union into its constituent republics in 1991, Russia set about reestablishing its empire, piece by piece. These efforts included Russian-instigated separatist movements in neighboring countries, military invasions, illegal annexations, mercenary deployments, cyberattacks, manipulated elections, the poisoning of politicians, and massive disinformation campaigns.

Inside Russia, which remains a tapestry of lands and peoples conquered and colonized under tsars and communists, these efforts have included warfare and mass atrocities, as in Chechnya.

So why has this fundamental, foundational fact about Russia been all but ignored in the West for so long, including among those who study and analyze the region? Why has it taken a brutal war of conquest for most Western Russia experts even to begin addressing Russia's nature as a vast colonial enterprise? Many continue to see Ukraine and other former Soviet countries through Moscow's empire-building lens, despite the obvious nature of Russian aggression since the 1990s and long before.

It's high time to decolonize Russian, East European, and Eurasian studies—and stop viewing the region through Moscow's imperial lens.

During the Cold War, Western universities, research institutions, and policy think tanks opened numerous centers and programs for Soviet, Russian, and Eurasian studies in a bid to better understand the Soviet Union and its heritage.

However, these efforts had a strategic flaw: Born in an era when Moscow's control reached far beyond today's Russian borders, these programs inevitably framed the region through a Moscow-centric lens. Today, even as they dropped "Soviet" from their name, most of these programs have inherited this old Moscow-centric framing, effectively conflating Russia with the Soviet Union and downplaying the rich histories, varied cultures, and unique national identities of Eastern Europe, the Baltic States, the Caucasus, and Central Asia—not to mention the many conquered and colonized non-Russian peoples inhabiting wide swathes of the Russian Federation.

The continuity from Soviet-era area studies matters.

For example, George Washington University's Institute for European, Russian, and Eurasian Studies lumps together all 15 former Soviet republics. Chatham House's Russia and Eurasia program studies the same countries minus the Baltic States and Moldova, and Leiden University's Russia and Eurasia studies covers Russia and its former colonies. Even if these larger institutes sometimes created new subdivisions, such as George Washington University's programs on Central Asia and Ukraine, the effect of studying these nations and regions alongside Russia highlights the latter as the main country to be studied and respected.

This unwittingly creates a paradigm whereby Russia's former colonies are perceived as remaining within Russia's orbit long after the collapse of the Russian Empire and Soviet Union. Imagine lumping Algeria into France studies or creating a contemporary Britain and India program—it would emphasize one relationship over others, keep the old colonial framing, and suggest that one country is the logical appendage of another as a subject of study.

Take the case of Ukraine. Only a handful of U.S. universities even offer a Ukrainian history course, despite the fact that Ukraine, a country of more than 40 million people, has a culture, language, and national tradition that has developed differently from Russia's for hundreds of years. Especially since it regained its independence in 1991, Ukraine presents a coherent set of geopolitical choices signaling to the world that it is an independent state with a European identity and orientation. Yet Western academia continues to shoe-horn the country into the Russian space.

Worse yet, the label "Eurasia" used today by many university and think tank programs echoes a central tenet of Russian nationalism—that it's Russia's destiny to dominate Eurasia from Portugal to the Bering Strait. There is an entire ideology of Eurasianism, whose main advocate is Aleksandr Dugin, one of Russia's most zealous fascist ideologues.

Dugin and his followers promote the creation of a Eurasian state by re-conquering Russia's former colonies, establishing Slavic and Orthodox dominance, and marginalizing other nations.

Putin's fantastical vision of Russian history and destiny increasingly echoes Eurasianist ideas as well. When Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, or Belarus are placed under the "Eurasia" label, the implicit message is that these are former Russian colonies remaining in Russia's sphere of influence. For Ukrainians fighting for the existence of their nation and culture against Russia's genocidal aggression, this label is simply offensive.

In many cases, Western academic programs require students to study the Russian language—often including courses in Moscow or Saint Petersburg—before they have the option of studying any of the region's other languages, if they are so inclined and if those languages are even offered. A similar problem affects cultural studies, including literature and art, where the many ways Russian works—including the classics read by countless high school and university students—transport Moscow's imperial ideology are rarely addressed. This only perpetuates the habit of looking at the former Soviet-controlled and Russian-occupied space through the prism of the world's last unreconstructed imperial culture. Unwittingly, today's Russia studies in the West still replicate the worldview of an oppressor state that has never examined its history and is nowhere near having a debate about its imperial nature at all—not even among the Russian intellectuals or so-called liberals with whom Western students, academics, and analysts generally interact and cooperate.

Finally, Western academia also presents Russia itself as a monolith, with little or no attention paid to the country's Indigenous peoples. By now, many who study Russian history are at least vaguely familiar with the Stalin-era genocide of the Crimean Tatars and their replacement on the peninsula by Russian settlers.

But why not shed more light on the Russian conquest and subjugation of Siberia, one of the most gruesome episodes of European colonialism? Or Russia's 19th-century mass murder of the Circassians, Europe's first modern-era genocide?

What have we learned about the short-lived Idel-Ural state, a confederation of six autonomous Finno-Ugric and Turkic republics crushed by the Bolsheviks in 1918? Why not highlight Tatarstan, which proclaimed its independence from Russia in 1990? Nascent efforts to give Russia's Indigenous peoples a voice have gotten underway, including the Free Peoples of Russia Forum that last convened in Sweden in December 2022—but they have hardly registered in Western academia. Not only are Western scholars' interests and relationships Russia-centric; within Russia, those relationships and contacts are Moscow-centric. It's as if Russia's highly diverse regions didn't exist.

What should be done in practice to decolonize Western studies of Russia and the region?

First, universities and think tanks on both sides of the Atlantic should strike "Eurasia" out of their program names, not least because it is a geopolitical concept straight out of Russian far-right nationalism. There is no shortage of more appropriate terms to designate the countries being studied. For instance, geographical terms such as Eastern Europe, Baltics, South Caucasus, and Central Asia could easily be used.

Second, existing centers of Russian studies should refocus their attention to reflect the history and contemporary experiences of Indigenous peoples living in today's Russian Federation. In an academic world that is everywhere addressing issues of diversity, representation, and respect, this is long overdue and morally right. It would allow the world to see Russia for what it actually is: an empire made up of multiple peoples craving for voice, agency, opportunities, and freedom.

Third, we need to establish and strengthen institutions that study Russia's former colonies. This would include Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar studies, Belarusian studies, Georgian studies, Moldovan studies, and so on. This will allow academic circles and wider audiences to obtain a better understanding of the region and defy Russian propaganda about "historically Russian lands," as the actual history of these peoples, states, and national identities finally comes to light in the West. A great example of this approach is Cambridge University's Ukrainian Studies program.

These efforts are necessary, but they can only be the beginning in removing Russian imperial narratives from the Western academy and mental space. They are a good start toward respecting diversity, upholding norms of peaceful coexistence, learning history, and eventually getting rid of Russia-centric regional studies as we know them. Since language is the mirror of thought, we need to start mending the paradigms that cloud our thinking of what Russia and its neighbors really are.

By Artem Shaipov, a member of the Aspen Institute's NexGen Transatlantic Initiative, and Yuliia Shaipova, an advisor at the Ukrainian Parliament.