

# Conflict Update

March 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022

## Conflict Assessment

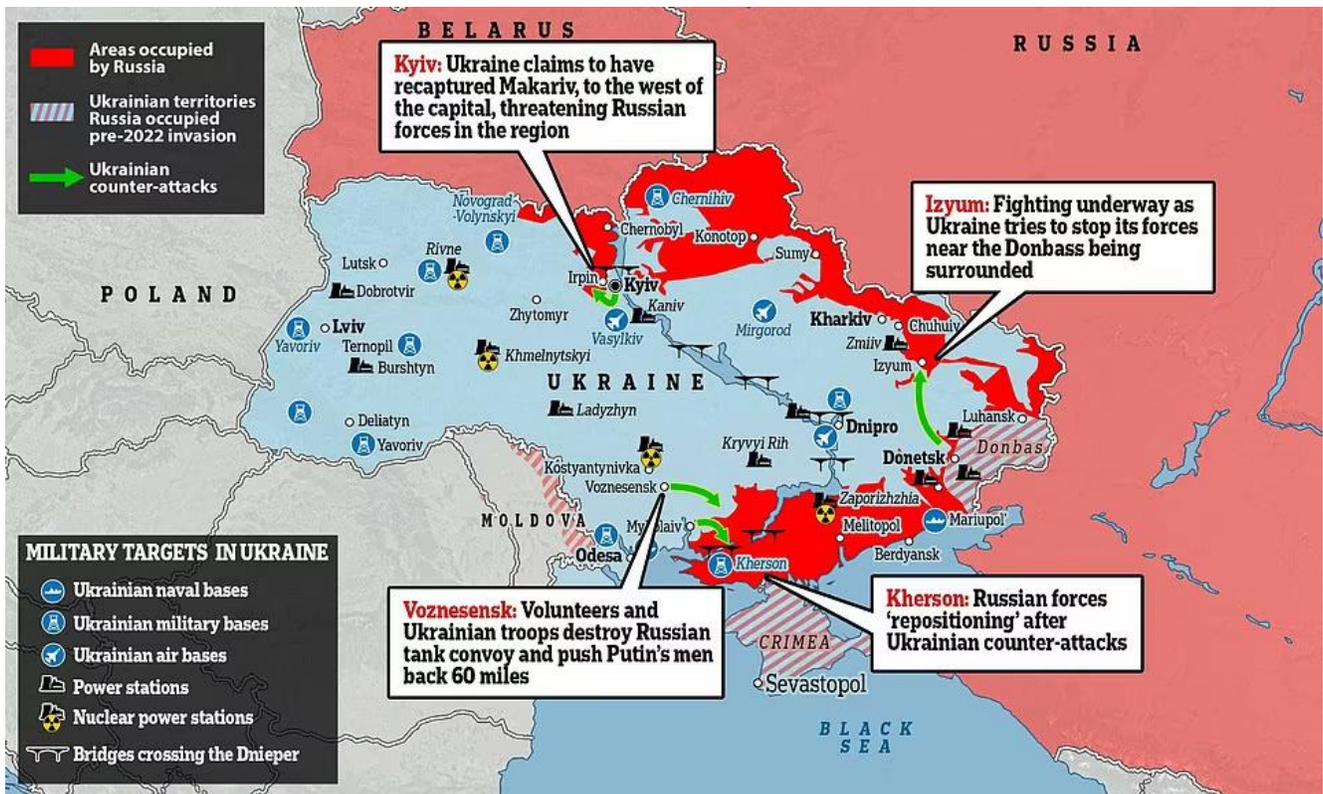
**U.S. says Ukraine has pushed back Russian forces outside Kyiv** - Russian forces northeast and east of Kyiv have been pushed back to about 55 kilometers outside the capital, while other troops 15 to 20 kilometers northwest of Kyiv appear to be "digging in" and establishing "defensive positions," a senior U.S. defense official told reporters Wednesday.

**Why it matters:** Russia's advance on Kyiv has been stalled for weeks, and there are now indications that Ukraine's counteroffensive is showing success. That could cause Russia to re-evaluate its strategy as the Kremlin becomes desperate for momentum to force Ukraine to offer concessions at the negotiating table.

**Russian War Casualties** - Russia has lost more than 15,000 troops in Ukraine, the country's generals claimed today, as they launched a series of counter-attacks across the country to push back Putin's forces after a month of dogged defending.

Ukraine's General Staff said Wednesday that Russia has now lost 15,600 men in fighting, along with 517 tanks and 1,600 armored vehicles amid reports that their troops have recaptured the city of Makariv, to the west of the Kyiv, as photos showed troops raising a Ukrainian flag from one of the buildings.

The move puts Russian forces bogged down fighting in Irpin, Bucha and Borodyanka at risk of being cut off.



Videos posted online late Tuesday appeared to show one of the counter-attacks, with Ukrainian troops engaged in heavy fighting to the west of Kyiv, unleashing a hail of rocket-propelled grenades and machine-gun fire.

**Up to 40,000 Russian soldiers killed, wounded, captured or MIA in Ukraine, NATO estimates** - NATO estimates that up to 40,000 Russian troops have been killed, injured, captured or gone missing during the first month of the Kremlin's war in Ukraine, an alliance official confirmed to NBC News.

Of those, between **7,000 and 15,000** Russian troops have died, according to the official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity in order to share NATO's latest intelligence assessment of the ongoing war.

Russia may have lost up to one-fifth of its combat force in Ukraine, alliance officials say. Generally, when an army loses 10% to 15% of its forces, it withdraws or negotiates. The Russian have lost up to 24% of their invading force but still without any sign of compromise.

This bodes ill as it may indicate they are considering alternative weapons and tactics. This may be reinforced by the manner in which they are "digging in."

Ukrainian forces need to watch for protective gear being handed to Russian soldiers that indicate chemical or bioweapons are being introduced.

Russian officials have previously declined to publicly disclose how many of their troops have died while fighting in Ukraine. On Tuesday, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that disclosing such figures is the "exclusive prerogative" of Russia's Ministry of Defense.

"On the numbers, we agreed from the very beginning that we do not have the authority to voice them during the special military operation," Peskov said, declining to elaborate further.

The Pentagon has previously denied confirming any reported estimates on the number of Russian troops who have been killed or otherwise removed from the battlefield.

### **Ukrainian attack on Russian naval force**

Ukrainian forces conducted a successful attack on Russian ships docked at the occupied port of Berdyansk, likely sinking a landing ship and damaging or sinking another. Ukraine's demonstrated ability to inflict serious damage on Berdyansk may disrupt Russian forces from renewing attempts to reinforce operations in Mariupol and around Kherson by sea.

**Russia's military hit by high-ranking losses in Ukraine** - Ukrainian presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolyak on Sunday named six Russian generals who he said had been killed in Ukraine along with dozens of colonels and other officers.

A senior foreign diplomat in Moscow told Reuters: "For me what is important is the reported heavy casualties at colonel and above, the backbone of the Russian army, not just generals,"

Aside from the loss of a number of generals, it is being reported that dozens of colonels and other field ranks have also been killed or wounded.

Reports are coming in of Russian soldiers killing their officers for "lying about the invasion to us and leading us to our deaths." This is apparently prevalent in units where large numbers of Russian recruits have been killed.

**Russian equipment losses** - The Oryx Blog, an open-source site that tracks military-equipment losses, has reported that Russia has lost 1,666 vehicles in Ukraine, of which more than 800 have been destroyed during the conflict. Those confirmed destroyed include 111 tanks, 74 armored fighting vehicles, 123 infantry fighting vehicles, and 312 trucks, vehicles and jeeps.

“This list only includes destroyed vehicles and equipment of which photo or videographic evidence is available,” the bloggers wrote. “Therefore, the amount of equipment destroyed is significantly higher than recorded here.”

Since Feb. 24, the day Russia launched the war, the Russian army, in addition to 15,300 troops, has lost 509 tanks, 1,556 armored personnel carriers, 252 artillery systems, 80 multiple launch rocket systems, 1,000 vehicles of various types, and 45 anti-aircraft warfare systems, the Ukrainian General Staff said in a statement on Facebook.

Russians also lost 99 aircraft, 123 helicopters, 35 operational and tactical UAVs, and 15 special equipment units, the statement added.

Rob Lee, an expert on conflict from King's University, said the troops appeared to be Chechens fighting in Ukraine's Sheikh Mansur battalion - a Muslim-majority unit made up mostly of volunteers.

Western experts and observers have been predicting for days that Putin's army is now near 'culmination' - the point at which stockpiles of ammunition, food and fuel amassed ahead of the invasion will start to run out, forcing them to switch from attacking to defending and making their vulnerable to counter-attacks.

Ukraine's generals estimated on Tuesday that Moscow's troops had supplies left for 'no more than three days', though it appears resources in some areas have run out faster than that.

**Ukrainian tactics** – it appears Ukrainian forces have been adept at attacking and destroying Russian units along their rear and then from the front. They first take out petrol bowsers and food trucks in the rear of the column. They then attack the front of the column, hemming in the balance of troops and equipment in a “killing ground.” Tanks, estimated to run for about 250 miles on a full tank, now standing idly waiting for room to maneuver, soon run out of fuel and grind to a halt. They become sitting ducks for anti-tank weapons.

Ukrainian statements speak of “**Shoot and Scoot**” tactics, where they **shoot** mobile missiles and rocket launchers, and then **scoot** away before the opposite side can determine where they are.

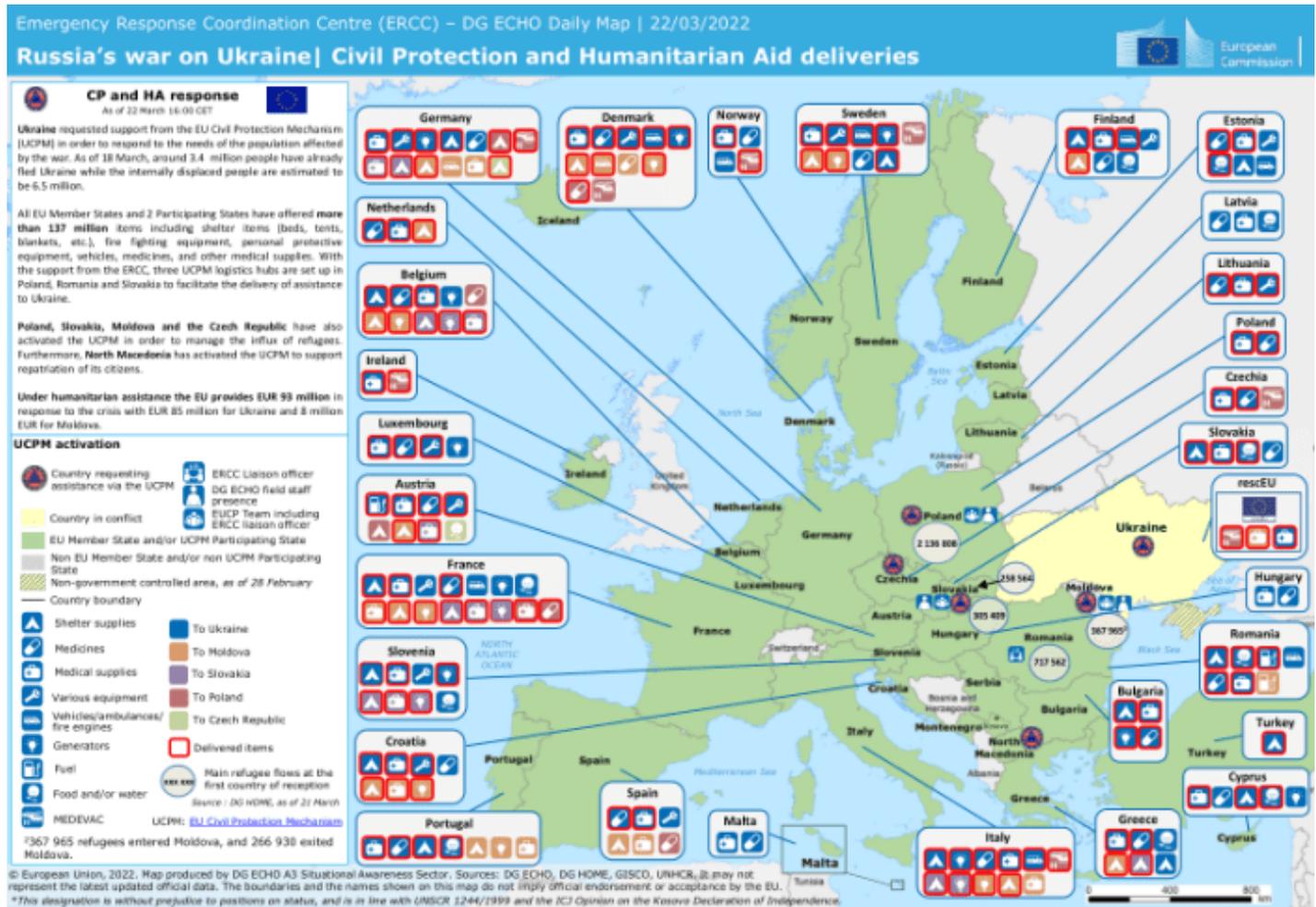
They have also attacked inbound supply columns that are further afield to ensure no replenishment and replacement units can make it through to the front line.

With Russian troops knocking out Ukrainian telecommunications networks, they themselves have been hampered by the consequent lack of repeater stations. Resorting to insecure radio communication links like cell phones, Russian positions and tactics quickly become known to Ukrainian electronic interceptors, who then home in and strike at the source of the signal, most times that of a commanding officer. It is reported that this is Ukrainian units have been killing senior Russian commanders, that most of senior officer deaths have been whilst in command posts.

Russian troops and equipment are then stuck “in limbo,” suffering from a lack of food and treatment. Flak vests have proven ineffective and requests for added armor-protected kit have been met with instructions from Russian officer to “be brave and fight on.” This appears to be the cause of increasing soldier mutinies against what they believe to be ineffective commanders.

Chechnyan commandos have been enlisting in Ukrainian units reportedly to avenge what Russia did to their country in a previous war.

# Ukrainian population displacement



## Containment

Earlier Wednesday, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said the alliance would approve a “major increase” of its forces. He said NATO is likely to bolster troops along its eastern flank, deploying four new battle groups in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia.

“I expect leaders will agree to strengthen NATO’s posture in all domains, with major increases in the eastern part of the alliance on land, in the air and at sea,” Stoltenberg said during a news conference ahead of the NATO leaders summit in Brussels.

U.S. Ambassador to NATO Julianne Smith told a virtual audience hosted by the Atlantic Council on Wednesday that a permanent stationing of U.S. and NATO troops is currently on the table.

**NATO Boosts Russia Flank with Four New Battle Groups** - NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said on Wednesday the Western alliance will deploy four new battle groups across Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia as part of its response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

NATO already has battlegroups in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland.

“I expect leaders will agree to strengthen NATO’s posture in all domains with major increases of forces in the eastern part of the alliance, on land, in the air, and at sea. The first step is the deployment of four new NATO battle groups in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia,” Stoltenberg told journalists in Brussels.

“This means that we will have eight multinational NATO battle groups all along the Eastern flank from the Baltic to the Black Sea,” Stoltenberg said ahead of an extraordinary NATO summit scheduled for March 24 that will also be attended by U.S. President Joe Biden.

**NATO has readied 140,000 troops since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine** - Since Russia’s February 24 invasion of Ukraine, NATO has readied 140,000 troops in the region and mobilized a colossal war chest of advanced military equipment. Of the approximately 140,000 troops, the United States has provided the lion’s share with 100,000 soldiers.

U.S. Ambassador to NATO Julianne Smith said Wednesday that a permanent stationing of U.S. and NATO troops is currently on the table.

## Predictions – 2021

Russian Journalist and Former Politician Predicted the Outcome in Ukraine Back in April 2021.

By accounts from western observers, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has stalled in more than one direction. Certainly, Vladimir Putin lost the information war within a week, and the Russian economy—meaning ordinary Russian citizens—will be absolutely battered by the sweeping sanctions regime imposed by nearly the entire world. In his quest to reclaim the Russian empire, Putin may well have turned his country into a hermit kingdom.

One explanation for this spectacular mistake—a mistake that will cost many Ukrainian and Russian lives—is the one offered by former State Department Regional Medical Officer/Psychiatrist Kenneth Dekleva, who suggested to me that much of this is the result of a profound intelligence failure within Putin's security apparatus. Contrary to the growing conventional wisdom that Putin has gone off the rails in terms of his mental state, Dekleva holds that he's the same sicko he always was, he's just operating on particularly bad information.

We have evidence pointing towards that conclusion. In a video posted to YouTube on April 11, 2021, journalist and former member of the Russian parliament Aleksandr Nevzorov appears to predict the consequences of a Russian invasion of Ukraine with an eerie prescience.

Nevzorov predicts (i) the Russian military will be far less effective in practice than its reputation would suggest, (ii) Putin's military analysts will feed him fantasies about how the invasion will play out based on war games that do not reflect reality, (iii) fierce Ukrainian resistance, even fiercer than what Russia ran into in Chechnya, (iv) huge troop losses for the Russians, (v) heavy use of undertrained conscripts, (vi) many of these men will have no idea why they're even fighting this war, (vii) massive external reaction, (viii) growing internal opposition that will eventually unite the anti-Putin factions in an antiwar movement, (ix) the conflict will end in tragedy and humiliation for Russia, in part because he thinks both military victory and military defeat will yield an overall defeat and (x) Japan will grow emboldened in their dispute with Russia over the Kuril Islands.

How did Nevzorov see all of this nearly a year ago, but Putin did not? It certainly suggests the boss was not sitting downstream on the right river of information.

## Widening of Conflict

**Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov issues chilling warning about 'direct clash' with NATO** - Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov warned that if NATO sends peacekeepers into Ukraine amid Russia's invasion, which will lead to a direct military clash between the Russian forces and the alliance.

"Sending NATO peacekeepers to Ukraine would lead to a direct clash between the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation and the alliance," Lavrov said Wednesday morning, according to the Russian state-news agency TASS.

**Chemical Weapons** - 'Clear Sign' Russia Will Use Deadly Chemical Weapons Against Ukraine in a False-Flag Operation.

**Nuclear weapons** - In an ominous sign that Moscow might consider using nuclear weapons, a senior Russian official said the country's nuclear arsenal would help deter the West from intervening in Ukraine.

"The Russian Federation is capable of physically destroying any aggressor or any aggressor group within minutes at any distance," Dmitry Rogozin, the head of the state aerospace corporation, Roscosmos, said in televised remarks. He noted that Moscow's nuclear stockpiles include tactical nuclear weapons, designed for use on battlefields, along with far more powerful nuclear-tipped intercontinental ballistic missiles. Roscosmos oversees missile-building facilities.

**Doomsday plane designed for nuclear war spotted flying below Ireland** - A doomsday plane that was designed to be an airborne base for the US during nuclear war has been spotted flying below Ireland.

The Boeing 747 E4-B aircraft remain in the air for days. It can even withstand the electromagnetic pulse from a nuclear blast. The plane, known as the 'Flying Pentagon' would house senior military personnel and the defense secretary.

**Biden warns Russia NATO will respond if Kremlin uses chemical weapons** - Joe Biden raised the stakes with Russia over its unprovoked invasion of Ukraine by warning that NATO would be forced to respond if the Kremlin resorted to using chemical weapons.

Speaking in the aftermath of emergency NATO and G7 summits in Brussels, the US president said that any retaliation would be proportional, though he would not confirm that he would insist on military action.

"We would respond," Biden said, in response to a question about what NATO would do. "We would respond if he uses it. The nature of the response would depend on the nature of the use."

**Russia says Poland destroying relations with expulsions, vows tough response** - Russia accused Poland on Thursday of trying to destroy bilateral relations by expelling 45 of its diplomats and said it would respond harshly.

The Russian ambassador said Poland, which said on Wednesday it was expelling the diplomats on suspicion of working for Russian intelligence, had also blocked the embassy's bank accounts.

The Russian foreign ministry said the expulsions were "a conscious step towards the final destruction of bilateral relations, the dismantling of which our Polish 'partners' have been systematically carrying out for a long time".

It added: "Russia will not leave this hostile attack without a response, which will make Polish provocateurs think and will hurt them."

## Putin Concerns

**Dissent Brews Over Putin's Leadership** - In January, the head of a group of serving and retired Russian military officers declared that invading Ukraine would be "pointless and extremely dangerous." It would kill thousands, he said,

make Russians and Ukrainians enemies for life, risk a war with NATO and threaten “the existence of Russia itself as a state.”

Reached by phone this week, the retired general who authored the declaration, Leonid Ivashov, said he stood by it, though he could not speak freely given Russia’s wartime censorship: “I do not disavow what I said.”

The failures of Mr. Putin’s campaign are apparent in the striking number of senior military commanders believed to have been killed in the fighting. Ukraine says it has killed at least six Russian generals, while Russia acknowledges one of their deaths, along with that of the deputy commander of its Black Sea fleet. American officials say they cannot confirm the number of Russian troop deaths, but that Russia’s invasion plan appears to have been stymied by bad intelligence.

Igor Girkin, a former colonel in Russia’s F.S.B. intelligence agency and the former “defense minister” of Russian-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine, said in a video interview posted online on Monday that Russia had made a “catastrophically incorrect assessment” of Ukraine’s forces.

“There was probably the hope that they wouldn’t resist so intensely,” Yevgeny Buzhinsky, a retired lieutenant general and a regular Russian state television commentator, said of Ukraine’s forces. “They were expected to be more reasonable.”

As if responding to criticism, Mr. Putin has said repeatedly in his public comments about the war that it is going “according to plan.”

“We can definitively say that nothing is going to plan,” countered Pavel Luzin, a Russian military analyst. “It has been decades since the Soviet and Russian armies have seen such great losses in such a short period of time.”

The failures in Ukraine have started to create fissures within Russian leadership, according to Andrei Soldatov, an author and expert on Russia’s military and security services. The top Russian intelligence official in charge of overseeing the recruitment of spies and diversionary operations in Ukraine has been put under house arrest along with his deputy, Mr. Soldatov said. Even Russia’s defense minister, Sergei K. Shoigu, who vacations with Mr. Putin and has been spoken of as a potential presidential successor, has suffered a loss of standing, according to Mr. Soldatov’s sources.

There have been an increasing number of retired general staff officers commenting negatively on Putin over the past week. Of import here is that they are “going public” seemingly without fear of retribution. This may speak to the growing unease of the Russian general officer corp.

**Putin Opens a Second Front: The Battle Against ‘Traitors’ Inside Russia** - Russia’s full-scale war against Ukraine, conceived as a “blitzkrieg,” has gone on already for a month, inflicting colossal damage to Ukraine and making life in Russia substantially worse. Nevertheless, pro-government sociological centers claim that the popular approval for Vladimir Putin continues to grow, affirming that as of March 13, it was at 77.2 percent (Ren.tv, March 18). They are echoed by several independent sociologists, who confirm that nearly three-quarters of Russians support the war against Ukraine. Over the past weeks, this percentage has grown even further (Hvylya.net, March 16). At the same time, other sociologists note that “the chauvinistic euphoria of 2014 is unlikely to be duplicated.” Still, some warn that the people fear to say what they think and therefore, the value of today’s sociological data is not very high (Euronews, March 13).

However, regardless of the population’s mood, there is a significant split within the Russian elite. Russian officials and propagandists are starting to quit and go abroad. One of the first to leave Russia was the deputy general director of Aeroflot, Andrey Panov (Deutsche Welle—Russian service, March 12). Following the protest of Marina Ovsyannikova, editor at the Russian state-controlled Channel One, who appeared on air with an anti-war placard, propagandists began to abandon Russia’s federal TV channels (BBC—Russian service, Obozrevatel.com, March 15).

Speaking on March 16 at a meeting on socio-economic support for the regions, Putin referred to those who follow a Western lifestyle as “national traitors.” In his words, they represent a “fifth column” on which the West can count to “dismember Russia.” The president expressed hope that “the Russian people can always discern true patriots from scum and traitors” and “the natural and necessary purging of society” will strengthen the country (Kremlin.ru, March 16).

On the one hand, such statements reveal Putin’s deep uncertainty that the elite will unquestioningly support his military adventure. On the other, many are inclined to think that such declarations signal the start of a new round of repression against all segments of the population. Novaya Gazeta journalist Kirill Martynov is confident that “the country should expect a hunt for dissidents even more ambitious than in recent years” (YouTube, March 17).

**Putin's 'Achilles heel' in Ukraine is Russians believing their 'soldiers are dying unnecessarily,'** - Soviet Russia finally pulled out of Afghanistan because fierce Afghan resistance, fueled by U.S.-provided Stinger missiles, was eating away at Russian forces, eventually resulting in 15,000 Russian deaths. "Today the death toll of Russian troops in Ukraine could already match those killed over 10 years in Afghanistan," CNN's Nic Robertson reported early Thursday, citing NATO estimates.

"Afghan parallels with today's war in Ukraine are clear," Robertson said. "Russia's enemies, if not Russia, have learned the lessons of the Afghan war."

"Across dozens of Russian cities, more than 15,000 people have been arrested for protesting the war," Robertson said. "Recently, anxious parents of troops have begun showing up. Putin's Achilles heel is the perception soldiers are dying unnecessarily. It's why he's tightened reporting laws and swamped Russia with Kremlin propaganda, and it's why the Ukrainian military shows off battlefield gains — like knocking out Russian tanks or captured Russian soldiers — because they know bad press back home is what the Red Army out of Afghanistan."

## War Crimes

**US formally declares Russian military has committed war crimes in Ukraine** - The US government has formally declared that members of the Russian armed forces have committed war crimes in Ukraine, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a statement Wednesday.

The official US declaration that Moscow's troops had violated the laws of conflict comes after Blinken, President Joe Biden and Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman, all said it was their personal opinion that war crimes have taken place.

"Today, I can announce that, based on information currently available, the US government assesses that member of Russia’s forces have committed war crimes in Ukraine," Blinken said in a statement. "Our assessment is based on a careful review of available information from public and intelligence sources," he said.

**Defections and dismissals** - Russia’s Ministry of Defense Head Sergei Shoigu reportedly missing, hasn't made public appearances in 12 days. The head of Russia's Ministry of Defense Sergei Shoigu has not been seen in public for 12 days and is possibly missing, according to reports and messages circulated on Telegram on Wednesday.

Investigative journalists from the Russian independent news outlets Mediazona and Agentstvo claimed on Wednesday that the normally media savvy Shoigu has not appeared in public since March 11.

Earlier reports today report he made a very brief appearance in Moscow.

## Cyber Warfare

As Ukraine Invasion Stalls, Putin Looks to Cyber for Revenge Attack on US. Crow, Democratic Congressman Jason Crow of Colorado, who serves on the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Cyber, Innovative Technologies, and Information Systems said that Putin believes in "proportional" responses, so if Russia were to launch an attack in response to the new sanctions tied to Ukraine, the likely target would be America's financial system. Banks, private financial companies and key economic sectors could all become targets. Because these attacks could come at any time and through a variety of means, Crow said shoring up vulnerable institutions should be a priority.

Hackers initiating a cyberattack often target smaller firms connected to larger institutions in order to achieve their goals, Crow said, as they did in the SolarWinds hack. Through a practice called "island hopping," malicious actors breach the security of smaller businesses that may be doing contract for larger firms and use that "door" to work their way through related digital systems to their primary target.

## Financial

**Russia's Cold War-era currency deal** with India to avoid dollar-based trade could return next week. Russia and India could revive their Cold War-era currency pact as soon as next week, a top trade executive said, as Western sanctions restrict dollar-based transactions.

A Sakthivel, the president of the Federation of Indian Export Organisations, told CNBC Wednesday the Indian government is working on a deal that would allow several Indian banks to use rupee-ruble ledgers.

India is the world's third largest oil importer, and a rupee-ruble mechanism could reduce India's risk of potentially stiffer limits on Russian oil, which so far have not been subject to most sanctions. But US and UK are banning it, and support is growing among EU states to do so as well.

Last week, India bought 3 million barrels of Russian crude at a steep discount, underscoring the potential for a currency deal between the two nations.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia and China have also been exploring an oil deal to circumvent the US dollar. The two countries are in talks to price oil contracts in yuan, which would snap Saudi Arabia's 50-year precedent of exclusively trading oil in dollars.

**Putin Orders Europe to Pay Rubles for Russian Gas** – Russia will force Europe to start paying for gas supplies in rubles, President Vladimir Putin said Wednesday in televised remarks.

"I have decided to implement a set of measures to transfer payments for our gas supplies to unfriendly countries into Russian rubles," Putin said, ordering the changes to be implemented within a week.

Berlin said Russia's demands constitute a breach of contract, while Vienna and Rome both said they would continue paying for Russian gas in euros, citing Moscow's attempt to skirt the impact of sanctions.

The Russian ruble, whose value cratered in the wake of the sanctions, jumped on Putin's announcement, strengthening by almost 4% against the U.S. dollar in trading in Moscow. Prices for gas in Europe rose 8%.

Russia is currently requiring exporters to sell 80% of their hard currency earnings — effectively using its extensive export earnings to replace the Central Bank's frozen reserves and stop the Russian ruble from falling even further.

**EU clinches U.S. LNG deal brushes off Russian ruble demand** - The European Union and United States are set to unveil a deal on Friday to supply Europe with more U.S. liquefied natural gas (LNG), sources told Reuters, as the European bloc seeks to quickly curb its reliance on Russian fossil fuels.

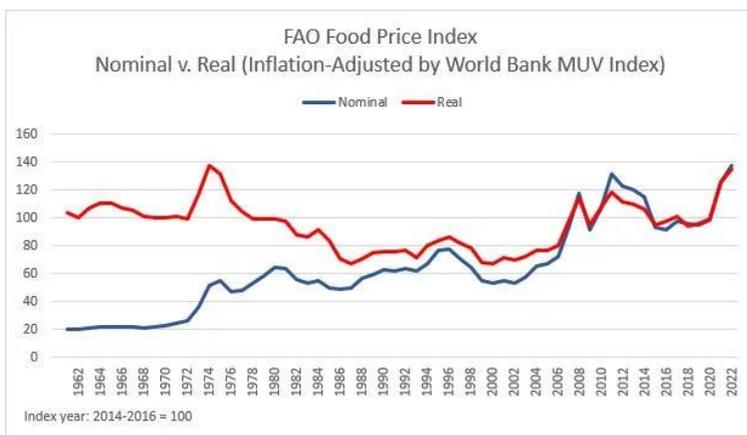
The invasion of Ukraine by Russia, Europe's top gas supplier, pushed already-high energy prices to records and has prompted the EU to pledge to cut Russian gas use by two thirds this year, by hiking imports from other countries and quickly expanding renewable energy.

## Impacts

**Russia's Invasion of Ukraine Exacerbates Hunger in Middle East, North Africa** - The Black Sea area affected by the Ukrainian crisis exports at least 12 percent of the food calories traded in the world. Ukraine has one-third of the world's most fertile soil according to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and 45 percent of its exports are agricultural-related. It is among the world's leading exporters of sunflower oil, rapeseed and barley, corn, wheat, and poultry. A large part of the country's wheat production comes from areas of eastern Ukraine where the current conflict is most intense.

On March 9, 2022, Ukraine banned exports of grain and other food products to prevent a domestic humanitarian crisis. Even if these supply chain disruptions are resolved soon, the problems would most likely persist because farmers are fleeing the fighting and the conflict is destroying infrastructure and equipment. The fighting could also gravely diminish the coming harvest, particularly if it continues into the start of the planting season in April.

Essential food prices were already increasing globally because of disruptions in the food supply chain caused by the pandemic and the conflict has added to that, according to the FAO. Many countries in the Middle East and North Africa are especially reliant on Ukrainian grain and seed oil, and vulnerable to food price shocks.



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Maize exports from Ukraine to some European and Asian countries are used for animal feed and disruptions can have secondary impacts on poultry and pig feedstock. Imported corn is also an important food source for many African countries and supply constraints can increase prices across the board, further exacerbating food insecurity, which is the lack of access to adequate safe and nutritious food for normal growth and development.

Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, grain futures such as for wheat, corn, and soybean have already increased.

**Lebanon** - The impact of potential food price rises exacerbated by the conflict will be acutely felt in Lebanon. In 2020, about 80 percent of Lebanon's total wheat imports came from Ukraine, and another 15 percent from Russia.

**Libya** - relies on Ukraine for over 40 percent of its wheat imports.

**Egypt** - the world's biggest buyer of wheat, relies heavily on subsidized imports to ensure affordable access to bread and vegetable oil, with more than 70 million Egyptians relying on subsidized bread.

**Syria** - already has severe wheat shortages because of a debilitating economic crisis and the destruction of infrastructure due to a decade of armed conflict.

**Yemen** - more than half of the population faces food insecurity.

**Biden: Russia should be removed from G-20, Ukraine should step in** - During a press conference from Brussels, President Biden said he believes Russia should be removed from the G-20, the group featuring the 20 biggest economies in the world, and that it was discussed during the NATO summit. He also added that the suggestion was for Ukraine to be able to attend G-20 meetings.

**Russia moves to expel U.S. diplomats in tit-for-tat move** - The United States Embassy in Moscow on Wednesday received a list of its diplomats that were declared "persona non grata", a State Department spokesperson said, in what Russian media said was a response to a U.S. move ousting Russian staff at the United Nations.

Washington last month said it was expelling 12 Russian diplomats at the country's U.N. mission in New York over national security concerns, and later announced it would oust an additional Russian at the U.N. who it said was a spy.

Russia, which denies the allegations, told the United States on Wednesday it would throw out an unspecified number of American diplomats in response to the moves, Interfax news agency said.

"The American side was told very firmly that any hostile U.S. actions against Russia would provoke a decisive and comparable response," the agency said.

## China's Concerns

**NATO leaders warn China: Don't act as Russia's enabler** - Western leaders have had enough of China's comradeship with Russia during the war in Ukraine.

At a meeting of NATO heads of state and government in Brussels on Thursday, the leaders zeroed in on fears that China could increasingly act as an enabler of the Kremlin — through arms, trade lifelines and disinformation — just as the West wants to batter Russia with sanctions and undercut its offensive in Ukraine with weapons deliveries.

"Almost all" of the 30 national leaders spoke about China, according to a senior official with knowledge of the extraordinary summit.

China does indeed face divided priorities over Russia.

On the one hand, Beijing wants to have an authoritarian partner to help it act as a counterweight to Washington. Chinese state media have blamed NATO for the war, Foreign Minister Wang Yi describes the friendship with Moscow as "rock solid" and European leaders have received what a senior EU official calls "very reliable evidence" that Beijing is considering arms sales to Russia. On the other hand, Biden's veiled threat of economic fallout for China is a nightmare for a country that wants to keep selling its goods to rich Western markets. (Politico).

In their statement, the NATO leaders called on China "to uphold the international order including the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity, as enshrined in the UN Charter, to abstain from supporting Russia's war effort in any way, and to refrain from any action that helps Russia circumvent sanctions."

The statement added: "We are concerned by recent public comments by [Chinese] officials and call on China to cease amplifying the Kremlin's false narratives, in particular on the war and on NATO, and to promote a peaceful resolution to the conflict."

**China's 'No-Limit' Tie with Russia Has Bottom Line, China Envoy Says** - The cooperation between China and Russia that was declared to have "no limit" still has a bottom line to respect the United Nations Charter, said Ambassador Qin Gang