

Conflict Update # 59

May 14th, 2022

Conflict Assessment

Key Takeaways

Catastrophic Russian losses in a failed river crossing and the military incompetence displayed in that crossing have shaken the confidence of some prominent Russian milbloggers.

Russian forces continue shaping operations for the Battle of Severodonetsk from the south even though those losses have at least temporarily disrupted their efforts from the north.

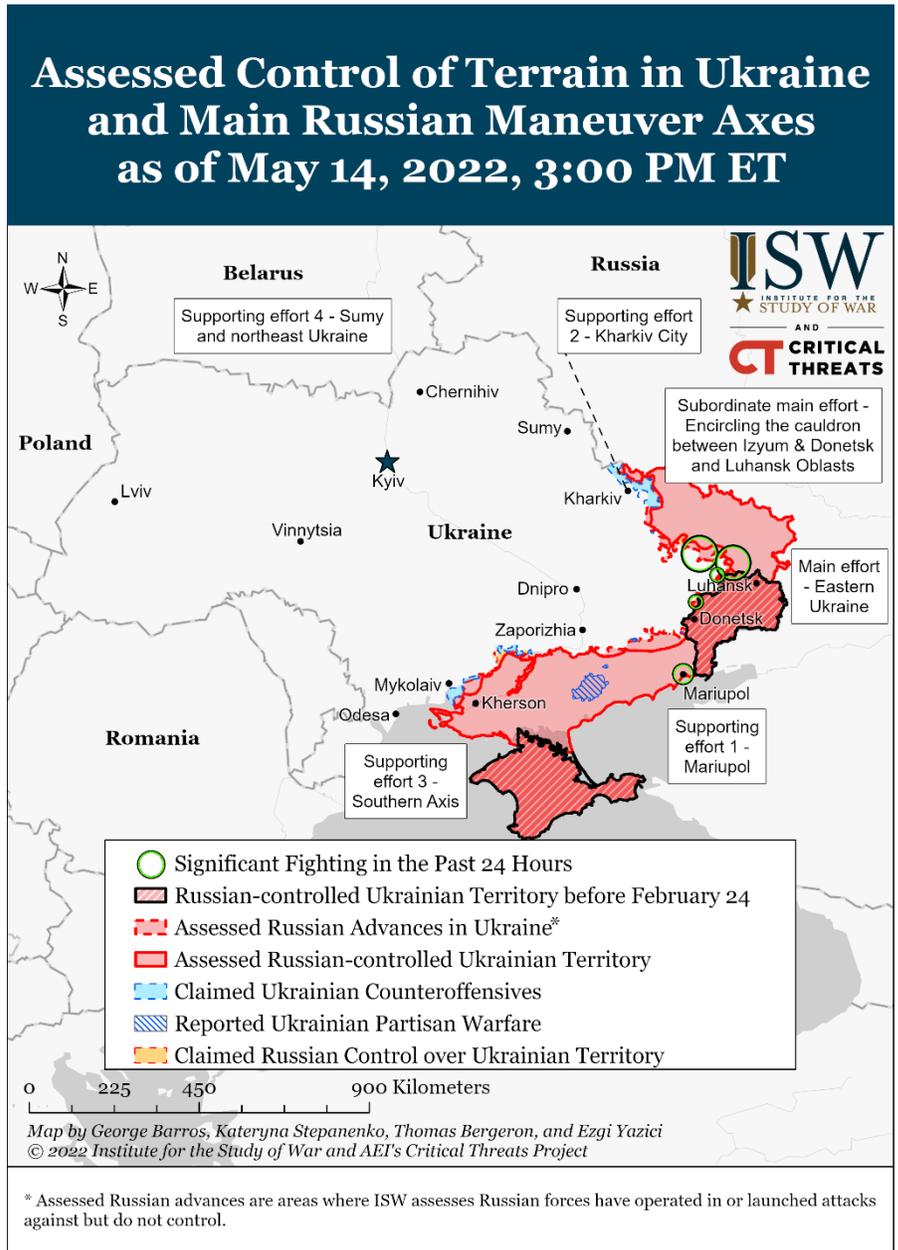
Ukrainian forces announced that they will conduct a counteroffensive around Izyum.

Russian forces continued to withdraw from northern Kharkiv Oblast, but will likely seek to hold a line defending their ground lines of communication from Belgorod via Vovchansk to Izyum.

Subordinate Main Effort—Southern Kharkiv, Donetsk, Luhansk Oblasts - Russian forces did not conduct active offensive operations around Izyum, continuing to shell and reconnoiter Ukrainian positions south and west of the settlement. Kharkiv Oblast Administration Head Oleg Synegebov announced today that Ukrainian forces launched a counteroffensive likely northwest of Izyum and forced Russian forces to retreat in some unspecified areas.

Future Ukrainian counteroffensives from Kharkiv City or western directions may force Russians to halt their advances to Slovyansk to defend Russian ground lines of communication (GLOCs).

Russian forces attempted to advance east of Popasna, likely continuing to set conditions for the Battle of Severodonetsk. Luhansk Oblast Administration Head Serhiy Haidai reported that Russian forces attempted to secure



access to the T1303 Lysychansk-bound highway east of Popasna yesterday. Haidai noted that Ukrainian artillery continues to repel Russian advances on Severodonetsk itself from the north but noted that Russians had accumulated a large amount of equipment in the area to break Ukrainian resistance.

Russian forces continued to conduct assaults near Avdiivka in an effort to break through Ukrainian defenses in the region and Ukrainian General Staff reported that they were partially successful. The Donetsk People's Republic also claimed that Russian infantry made farther advances using transmitted coordinates of Ukrainian positions in the area of Avdiivka. Avdiivka social media users reported that Russians did not enter Avdiivka, but attempted to advance from the north on May 13 and continued mortar shelling. ISW does not have sufficient information available in the open-source to confirm or refute these claims, but Ukrainian forces are likely maintaining their fortifications in the town itself.

Supporting Effort #1—Mariupol - Russian forces conducted ground, air, and artillery assaults on the Azovstal Steel Plant on May 14. Ukraine's Azov regiment said that they used heavy artillery, tanks, and infantry to launch an assault on Azovstal but that Ukrainian forces continued to hold defensive positions at the plant and its outskirts. A Donetsk Oblast Police Representative reported that there are over 600 wounded Ukrainian servicemen surviving in unsanitary conditions at the Azovstal. Ukrainian officials are attempting to negotiate the evacuation of 60 medical professionals and heavily wounded servicemen as of May 14.

Russian occupation authorities continued to intensify control over the rest of Mariupol. Mariupol Mayor's Advisor Petro Andryushenko reported that Russian authorities are providing limited amounts of food to the remaining 150,000 Mariupol residents. Satellite imagery from April 7 to May 8 also showed that Russian authorities are speeding up mass burials.

Supporting Effort #2—Kharkiv City - Russian forces today continued to withdraw from the region north of Kharkiv City. They will likely focus on defending their ground lines of communication (GLOCs) to Izyum that pass through Vovchansk, roughly 60 km northeast of Kharkiv City. Kharkiv Oblast Administration Head Oleg Synegeubov reported that Russian forces did not shell Kharkiv City but instead fired at Ukrainian positions in northeastern Kharkiv Oblast. Ukrainian forces pushed Russian forces closer to the border and claimed to have liberated an unnamed settlement located "only hundreds of meters away" from the Russian border. Ukrainian social media videos show Ukrainian units operating in liberated settlements to target remaining Russian servicemen and clear out mines.

Supporting Effort #3—Southern Axis - Russian forces did not conduct offensive operations along the southern axis but continued artillery fire on Ukrainian positions throughout the region. Zaporizhia Oblast Military Administration reported that Russian forces have dug trenches in northwestern Zaporizhia Oblast approximately 20 kilometers from the highway to Zaporizhia City. They may be preparing for further offensive operations on Zaporizhia City, which is unlikely, or could be further fortifying access to Kherson Oblast from the north and east. Ukrainian forces reportedly destroyed a Russian field depot near Polohy, about 45 kilometers from the Donetsk Oblast border.

Russian occupation authorities continue to face administrative problems that prevent Russia from establishing full control over occupied territories. The Ukrainian Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported that the Kremlin is planning a referendum in Kherson Oblast on September 11, adding that Russian forces will attempt to recruit local collaborators throughout the summer. The wildly varying reports of possible dates for a referendum in Kherson (and denials that there will be any annexation) suggest considerable confusion within the Russian leadership at various levels about Russia's prospects for securing the area and, possibly, the best way forward. The GUR also reported that Russian forces are conducting covert mobilization in Crimea and are requiring residents to donate blood.

Russian forces began to strengthen air defense systems at Snake Island located off the Romanian coast in response to Ukrainian strikes on the island. The GUR reported that recent Ukrainian attacks wounded or killed 32 servicemen on Snake Island. Russian vessels may have been unable to evacuate Russian servicemen in a timely fashion due to the

Ukrainian missile and drone threat, contributing to the high casualties. Two Russian vessels reportedly left Snake Island on May 14.

Ukrainian General Staff also noted that Transnistrian forces returned to normal operations while Russian forces remained on high alert, which could indicate disagreements between the self-declared Transnistrian government and Russia over Transnistria's involvement in the war.

Supporting Effort #4—Sumy and Northeastern Ukraine – Nothing to report in this supporting effort.

Immediate items to watch

- Russian forces will likely complete their withdrawal from the vicinity of Kharkiv City but attempt to hold a line west of Vovchansk to defend their GLOCs from Belgorod to Izyum. It is unclear if they will succeed.
- The Russians will continue efforts to encircle Severodonetsk and Lysychansk at least from the south, possibly by focusing on cutting off the last highway connecting Severodonetsk-Lysychansk with the rest of Ukraine.
- A Ukrainian counteroffensive around Izyum will likely begin soon.
- The Battle of Mariupol will, apparently and surprisingly, continue.

Russian Military Seems Trapped In Ukraine - On May 9, Russian President Vladimir Putin had a major opportunity to escalate his war in Ukraine in a bid for a definitive victory. May is V-E, or Victory in Europe, Day. The Soviet Union defeated Nazi Germany that day in 1945, and it is a major holiday now. It was widely suspected that Putin would use the holiday to call for mass mobilization or declare war. This would give Putin the legal room and political space to demand greater sacrifices from the Russian people, especially the use of conscripts in the war to solve Russia's growing manpower problem.

Much to everyone's surprise, Putin made no such moves. He still seeks victory with the force committed to date. This is unlikely. The Russian offensive employed many of its best units at the start. That effort ground to a halt around Kyiv, the Ukrainian capital, and Russia withdrew.

The second phase of the war was Russia's more limited effort in the east, in Donbas. This has declined into small efforts to take small towns. At the start of this phase, there was large talk Russia might encircle a big part of the Ukrainian army east of the Dnieper River. This is now unlikely. Russia has not even completed the conquest of Mariupol. Ukraine has also begun to counter-attack.

A strategic victory, or at least breakthrough, looks increasingly unlikely with only the forces Putin has at hand. Yet he chose to avoid escalation. So the war seems increasingly like a stalemate. But Russia cannot win a war of attrition, given the massive Western economic and military support for Ukraine. Putin is stuck.

Russia is now sliding into a proxy war with the West. It obviously cannot sustain a military-economic race against the West in Ukraine. The West can arm and aid Ukraine far beyond what Russia can mobilize domestically (unless China jumps in to help in a big way, which is highly unlikely). The various political problems bedeviling the Western aid pipeline are being worked out. Russia will soon face a flood of high-end Western weapons.

And the Ukrainians themselves will not surrender. They are deeply committed to fighting for their country. They are better led than the Russians. Their morale is high. The whole country is now mobilized. We hear stories about grandmothers making Molotov cocktails. If Putin drags this war on for years, the Ukrainians seem to be willing to do the same.

Putin's best shot is probably to stop the war before the costs get worse at home, and then to see if he can hold onto his gains. But even this would be hard. His conquests will not be recognized globally nor by Ukraine, as his snatching of Crimea in 2014 was not. Russia would face not a border, but a 'line of control' running all through Ukraine. Behind that

line would be devastated, unproductive Ukrainian cities like Kherson filled with unhappy, likely resistant Ukrainians. In front of it would be the Ukrainian army poking all along the frontier.

So Putin cannot end the war – Ukraine will not just settle to be partially dismembered. And he cannot escalate, because he fears NATO intervention and unrest at home. He is stuck in a quagmire, and it will only worsen as it did in Afghanistan.

Russians withdraw from Ukraine's Kharkiv - Russian troops are withdrawing from Ukraine's second-largest city after weeks of heavy bombardment, the Ukrainian military said Saturday, as Kyiv and Moscow's forces engaged in a grinding battle for the country's eastern industrial heartland.

Ukraine's general staff said the Russians were pulling back from the northeastern city of Kharkiv and focusing on guarding supply routes, while launching mortar, artillery and airstrikes in the eastern Donetsk province in order to "deplete Ukrainian forces and destroy fortifications."

Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov said Ukraine was "entering a new - long-term - phase of the war."

As the country's top prosecutor put a Russian soldier on trial for war crimes, the first of dozens that could face charges, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Ukrainians were doing their "maximum" to drive out the invaders and that the outcome of the war would depend on support from Europe and other allies.

"No one today can predict how long this war will last," Zelenskyy said in his nightly video address late Friday.

Russia's offensive in the Donbas, a mining and industrial region which Moscow-backed separatists have partially controlled since 2014, appeared to be turning into a back-and-forth slog with no major breakthroughs on either side.

Putin

Coup to remove cancer-stricken Putin underway in Russia, Ukrainian intelligence chief says - A coup is underway to oust Russian President Vladimir Putin, who is "very sick" due to cancer, according to Ukraine's head of military intelligence.

"It will eventually lead to the change of leadership of the Russian Federation. This process has already been launched and they are moving into that way," Ukrainian Major Gen. Kyrylo Budanov told the UK's Sky News in an exclusive interview. An interviewer asked if a coup is underway, to which Budanov replied, "Yes. They are moving in this way, and it is impossible to stop it."

Major General Kyrylo Budanov, 36, believes the tyrant's calamitous war in Ukraine will hit a "breaking point" in summer and be over before the end of the year.

Putin has cancer and other ailments, he said, dismissing the suggestion that he was spreading propaganda.

The Sunday Times recently reported that Putin has blood cancer, citing an unnamed Russian oligarch with close ties to the Kremlin. And a video recently resurfaced showing Putin shaking while welcoming Belarusian leader Alexander Lukashenko in mid-February, according to The Independent, fueling speculation that the despot has Parkinson's disease.

Meanwhile, a former NATO commander has said Putin is being circled by "hardmen" who want him ousted over his terrible handling of the war amid rumors of a coup.

Sir James Everard, who served as NATO's Deputy Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, said Putin was "in trouble" and running out of time to stop a coup against him.

Speaking to The Sun Online, the Brit former general, said: "Putin is in a terrible place. It was entirely of his own making.

Russian Troops Are Now Deliberately Wounding Themselves to Get Out of Putin's War - Nearly 90 days into Vladimir Putin's "special military operation" in Ukraine, Russian troops have apparently become so demoralized and desperate to quit they've begun deliberately injuring themselves.

A man identified as a Russian soldier in an air assault brigade based in Ukraine's Kherson region can be heard venting his frustrations to his mother and explaining why he wants to abandon the fight.

"Why would they [the Ukrainians] surrender? We're on their land," the soldier tells his mother. "This won't end anytime soon. What the hell do I need this for? At 20 years old... I'm not at all interested in Ukraine. I need to come back and resign," he says.

His astonished mother asks why there are no Russian troops in Ukraine determined to continue the fight for the sake of "patriotism," but the soldier, Nikita, just scoffs.

"I had a commander... who shot himself in the leg just to get out of here. And that was in the very beginning! What is there to talk about? He served in Chechnya."

His shocked mother goes on to argue that someone must "defend Russia" to stop the West from attacking, echoing the Kremlin narrative dominant on Russia's state-controlled news that Putin's war was launched to stop an imminent NATO assault.

"They will just kill us all, it'll be World War Four and Russia will lose!" she declares.

"Well, then Putin will maybe change his mind... There are no people, there's no ammunition," he said, adding that his own commander had sent letters trying to get his brigade pulled out, to no avail.

He said less than 50 percent of his brigade was left.

"Our people are just disappearing on their own. Some of them vanished without a trace, some were taken prisoner, some are hiding, some are already in Russia," he said.

Containment

U.S. Approves Possible Sale of 34 Lockheed F-35s to Belgium; Japan Deploying First F-35 to Misawa; India Allegedly Enters Conversation - The U.S. State Department issued a statement late Friday confirming it has approved the possible sale of 34 Lockheed F-35 Lightning II Joint Strike Fighters to Belgium.

Based on reports Belgium would potentially buy the F-35A variant of the Lightning II, the same variant used by the U.S. Air Force. One of the selling points of buying into the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter program is cross-force interoperability. Belgium potentially operating the same variant as the USAF, Dutch and Italians may have been one factor that helped propel the potential deal for Belgium.

Japan's Air Self-Defense Force also announced this week it will begin its first-ever deployment of a Japanese ASDF F-35A Lightning II at Misawa Air Base in Aomori Prefecture, northeastern Japan later this month.

A story that appeared in India's Economic Times said "American aerospace and defense major Lockheed Martin has proposed to manufacture custom-built F-35 fighter jets in India, which its officials say will give Indian industry a unique opportunity to become part of the world's largest fighter aircraft ecosystem."

This last paragraph is significant as India currently purchases the vast majority of its weapons from Russia. The Ukrainian war has seen the myth of Russian "comparable technology" evaporate.

We can expect to see American arms sales increase exponentially going forward – at the expense of the Russian arms sector.

Russian, U.S. defense chiefs discuss Ukraine situation over phone - Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin held a phone conversation on Friday to discuss the situation in Ukraine.

During the call initiated by the American side, the defense chiefs discussed topical issues of international security, including the situation in Ukraine, the Russian Defense Ministry said in a brief statement. This was the first phone conversation between Shoigu and Austin since Feb. 18, days before the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

Pentagon Announces Deployments to Replace Forces in Europe - Pentagon Press Secretary John F. Kirby announced the deployment of U.S. troops to Europe to replace forces ordered there earlier this year.

Kirby said Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III has ordered the deployment of around 10,500 personnel in the coming months to replace Army units ordered to the region in advance of, and in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Kirby stressed that these forces are not going to Ukraine but are there to ensure the defense of NATO countries. "These deployments are a one-for-one unit replacements, which leaves our overall force posture in the region - approximately 100,000 – unchanged," he said at a Pentagon news conference. "The units being replaced will return to their home stations following a proper turnover of responsibilities."

- The 101st Airborne Division Headquarters, from Fort Campbell, Kentucky, will replace the 82nd Airborne Division Headquarters in the European Command area of responsibility. This will involve 500 soldiers.
- Also from Fort Campbell, the 2nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team of the 101st Airborne Division will deploy approximately 4,200 soldiers to replace the 3rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team of Fort Bragg, North Carolina's 82nd Airborne Division in Poland.
- In addition, the 3rd Armored Brigade Combat Team of the 1st Cavalry Division, based at Fort Hood, Texas, will deploy approximately 4,200 soldiers to replace the 1st Armored Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division in Germany.
- Finally, the 1st Armored Division Combat Aviation Brigade consisting of approximately 1,800 service members from Fort Bliss, Texas, will replace the 1st Air Cavalry Brigade to support the United States' commitment to Atlantic Resolve.

These are not permanent moves, Kirby said. "They are moves designed to respond to the current security environment," he said.

Safe to assume – It is safe to assume that standard back channels of diplomacy continue to exist and see usage. Is it thus safe to assume that the US has warned Russia against use of weapons of mass destruction and nuclear options?

What is freely announced and promulgated in global press releases and statements, never fully covers what transpires behind closed doors in diplomatic exchanges.

Given historic US behavior in such matters, it is prudent to believe that such dialogue has transpired.

Four Lessons that Should Upend the Pentagon's Five-Year Strategy - from January to July, US defense services build their five-year budget proposals, called "the Program." Since the 2023 budget now lies with Congress, the armed services are currently building the 2024-29 Program, which will be submitted to the Office of the Secretary of Defense in July.

Today, the services are making their final programming decisions, such as which weapons are terminated, which force structure gets cut, and what levels of readiness they will maintain. Given what is being learnt with the war in Ukraine,

there are five crucial lessons to learn that will, if accepted, upend the current strategy that is underpinning the building of the defense budget.

- First, we are likely to **run out of bullets and weapons** in a protracted, multi-front war. We now have two data points from wars both small in scope and scale that have shown us that it takes years to replenish expended munitions: the last decade's war against ISIS, and the present war in Ukraine. This has been part of the US Defense Department's deliberate strategy to hope that "shock and awe" makes wars short.
- Second, prepare for **war this decade**, not just for war next decade. But Russia has shown that a declining power will strike sooner rather than later. Many believe that China's growth is no longer assured, and this may make Beijing much more dangerous in 2027 than in 2037.
- Third, **nuclear modernization**, while critical to deterrence, must not be done at the expense of the conventional force. Russia is nuclear-strong and conventionally weak. This posture, as we now see, heightens the chance of nuclear war, not reduces it.
- Fourth, **inflation** might do more damage to a fighting force than has been done by any enemy or even the last decade's period of sequestration. It appears that the U.S. might be on track for a two-to-three-year cumulative jump of nearly 20 percent.
- Finally, a **comprehensive and secure supply chain** will be essential in any future conflict. Russia's ailing re-supply ability proves this element beyond a doubt.

A C-146A Wolfhound Has Carried Out The First-Ever Landing of A U.S. Military Aircraft On a Latvian Highway – This week a U.S. Special Operations aircraft carried out highway operations in western Latvia, marking the first-ever landing of a U.S. military aircraft on a Latvian highway. As part of the annual Trojan Footprint 22 multinational exercise, a U.S. Special Operations Command C-146A Wolfhound, serial #12-3085, landed on the narrow two-lane, A9 highway near Biksti, in western Latvia.

According to the Latvian Public Broadcasting service, the location to be used as an improvised airstrip, spanning 900 meters, required around 2,000 kilometers of road to be checked. Since the wingspan of the C-146 Wolfhound is 21 meters, whereas the width of the road is 8.5 meters, to facilitate the landing, several road signs were removed so the wings would not hit them, while a bus stop was used to turn the aircraft around.

The C-146A Wolfhound's primary mission is to provide U.S. Special Operations Command flexible and responsive operational movement of small teams and cargo in support of Theater Special Operations Commands. Airlift missions are conducted by Air Force Special Operations Command aircrews to prepared and semi-prepared airfields around the world.



Israel denies equipping Ukraine with Blue Spear through Estonia - Israel's Defense Ministry on Saturday denied a false report that it had agreed to Estonia's request to equip Ukraine with the Blue Spear (5G SSM) land-to-sea missile system.

Ukrainian journalist Rostyslav Demchuk reported on Friday that Estonia, which purchased an unspecified number of Blue Spear systems from its manufacturer Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) in October 2021, asked Israel for its authorization to transfer one of the systems to Ukraine's Armed Forces, currently defending Ukraine against the Russian invasion. Demchuk claimed that Israel complied with the Baltic nation's request. As they say, where there is smoke.....

Humanitarian

Humanitarian aid reaches 6.4 million people in Ukraine: UN – More than 6.4 million people have been reached with vital humanitarian assistance in Ukraine since the country's military conflict with Russia started on Feb. 24, said UN humanitarian on Friday.

This includes more than 5.7 million people who have been able to put food on their table. Cash assistance has been provided to over 655,000 people, allowing them to cover some of their most basic needs, said the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

More than 1.5 million people have received health care support, and around 352,000 people have been provided with clean water and hygiene products. Nearly 430,000 people have received protection services, psychosocial support and critical legal services, including support to internally displaced persons, it said.

Despite this remarkable scale-up, many more people urgently need support, including those living in areas experiencing heavy fighting. The United Nations urges parties to the conflict to remove any barriers to the movement of humanitarian staff to ensure the continued delivery of life-saving assistance across Ukraine, said OCHA.

NATO

NATO Expansion in Focus as Blinken Travels to Europe for Talks on Russia-Ukraine War - The possible expansion of NATO will be a focus of talks today, as U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken heads to Berlin for an informal NATO foreign ministerial meeting.

Finnish President Sauli Niinisto and Prime Minister Sanna Marin have expressed their approval for joining the alliance, a move that would complete a major policy shift for the Scandinavian countries in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Friday his country does not support Finland and Sweden joining NATO, citing their support of what Turkey considers terrorist organizations, such as Kurdish militant groups. "We are following developments concerning Sweden and Finland, but we are not of a favorable opinion," Erdogan told reporters in Istanbul. Any NATO enlargement requires the unanimous consent of the existing members.

U.S. officials said they were working to "clarify Turkey's position," while reiterating that the "United States would support a NATO application by Finland and/or Sweden should they choose to apply."

"We strongly support NATO's Open Door policy," U.S. Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs Karen Donfried told reporters yesterday. "I think that it's important to remember that a fundamental principle the U.S. is defending in terms of its support for Ukraine is the right of every sovereign country to decide its own future foreign and security policy arrangement."

Both Sweden's and Finland's foreign ministers will participate in the North Atlantic Council informal dinner Saturday in Berlin. From Germany, Blinken heads to France on Sunday, where he will attend the second ministerial meeting of the U.S.-EU Trade and Technology Council, known as the TTC.

U.S. President Joe Biden talked with Swedish Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson and Finland's Niinisto on Friday. Sweden has been neutral for over two centuries and Finland since the end of WWII.

Impacts

China-Russia Relations - While China and Russia have avoided a formal alliance, their relationship has warmed substantially in recent years. In the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the China-Russia relationship has been of growing interest. Russia's ongoing war in Ukraine has cast a spotlight on China's close ties with Russia.

One of the key strengths is the strong personal relationship between Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin. Since he became China's president in 2013, Xi has met with Vladimir Putin 39 times, which is more than double the number of times Xi has met with leaders of any other major power.

While ties between Beijing and Moscow are currently close, there are areas of tension and uncertainty within the relationship. One potential long-term stressor on the relationship is the growing power disparity between the two countries, as China solidifies its position as the more "senior" partner.

This is most visible with respect to economic power. China's GDP has already far outpaced Russia's, and the gap between the two is set to widen as China's GDP is expected to climb toward nearly \$30 trillion in the coming years, while Russia's is forecasted to stagnate at well under \$2 trillion.

The two countries conducted their first joint military exercise in 2005, with another four exercises between 2007 and 2012. Starting in 2013, however, China and Russia significantly ramped up their participation in bilateral and multilateral exercises with each other. Through 2021, they have held a total of 53 military exercises.

Keep an eye out for this feature to learn more about how China and Russia benefit from these military exercises, as well as other forms of military cooperation, such as arms sales.

Historically, following the 1949 revolution, China modeled itself on the Russian system, but within years came to understand that this did not fully meet their needs.

They thus moved to a Sino system, causing friction between the two countries, including going to war with one another. At that stage Russia was the senior partner in the relationship, not as today.

The US, starting in the 1960's approached China in the belief it could woo them to a capitalist system, China was receptive and started opening its doors to Western influence.

But – China viewed this as an acceptance by the West of their centralized economy with freedom to become successful as an entrepreneur – as long as one didn't interfere in the central political arrangement, remaining as it did a central control point of all things Chinese.

This persisted for decades until both the US and China realized this not to be the case. The US realized that China had not delusions about becoming another "US" and China realized that the US did not accept a centralized political control structure as a financial system

And so, relations deteriorated and continue to do so. Atop all this is the Chinese assertion that Taiwan – formerly Formosa is part of the Chinese mainland and nation.

Taiwan - Formosa was ruled by the Japanese from 1895 to 1945 and in 1945, following the end hostilities in World War II, the nationalist government of the Republic of China (ROC), led by the Kuomintang (KMT). However, there was no transfer of territorial sovereignty.

In 1949, after losing control of mainland China in the Chinese Civil War, the ROC government under the KMT withdrew to Taiwan and President Chiang Kai-shek declared martial law, ruling the island along with smaller islands around it, as a

single-party state for forty years, until democratic reforms in the 1980s, which led to the first-ever direct presidential election in 1996.

In 2007, President Chen proposed a policy of Four Wants and One Without, which in substance states that Taiwan wants independence; Taiwan wants the rectification of its name; Taiwan wants a new constitution; Taiwan wants development; and Taiwanese politics is without the question of left or right, but only the question of unification or independence. The reception of this proposed policy in Taiwanese general public was unclear. It, however, was met with a cold reception by both the PRC and the United States.

The One China principle is the position held by the People's Republic of China (PRC) that there is only one sovereign state under the name China, with the PRC serving as the sole legitimate government of that China, and Taiwan is a part of China.

This Policy was further reinforced in an accord signed between the Kuomintang party and the Communist Party in 1992.

Most of the countries, including the US, stand by the 'One China' policy.

The situation is characterized by "strategic ambiguity" however, and the US passed the Taiwan Relations Act, "which basically commits America to the security of Taiwan without saying so."

Taiwan is among the richest countries in the world with a per capita income of \$55,000, much more than India and China. It is also the manufacturing base of the vast majority of electronics and chip production, essential to future global technical development. Hugely important to all, but particularly China who, without access to such technology, is believed will fall 25 to 30 years behind the West.

Four Ways China Is Growing Its Media Influence in Southeast Asia - As President Biden welcomes leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations to a special summit this week in Washington, D.C., his administration is affirming Beijing as the U.S.'s main rival and underscoring the region's importance in U.S.-China competition. The two-day event is part of the U.S effort to woo ASEAN members caught in a delicate balancing act between superpowers.

But China has been wooing as well, and not just with the trade and investment that are likely its most powerful levers of influence in Southeast Asia. Over the past decade, Beijing has steadily expanded its media influence in these countries in four key ways, as a means of shaping their views.

- Their most straightforward method of media outreach is **directly broadcasting or publishing** its state media content in target ASEAN countries. Xinhua, China's official state media agency, has print bureaus in every Southeast Asian country. TV news channels CCTV-4 and the English-language CGTN likewise operate in nearly every country in the region, while China Radio International airs multilingual content in Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, and Myanmar. Xinhua is a ministry-level agency directly under the State Council, while the other media organizations all operate under the Chinese Communist Party Publicity Department.
- It also airs its media through **partnerships and content-sharing agreements** with foreign media organizations in the target countries.
- It has also been **building relationships with journalists** in these countries in other ways. Since 2007, Beijing has organized multiple joint forums with ASEAN to promote media exchanges and cooperation, sometimes under the auspices of the Belt and Road Initiative. Since 2014, the government-backed national non-profit China Public Diplomacy Association has run a ten-month training program for foreign journalists which includes lectures on Chinese society and politics, internships at state outlets such as China Daily, and (heavily controlled) field trips to Xinjiang to promote the CCP's narrative there.
- Finally, **private Chinese firms** have also played a role in shaping Southeast Asia's media environment. For example, WeChat, a highly versatile app that offers text messaging, electronic payments, and news sharing,

has been gaining popularity in Southeast Asian countries. In 2020, it was authorized for use by the Indonesian central bank, establishing it as a legal form of payment in Southeast Asia's largest economy. Owned and developed by the tech giant Tencent, WeChat has a reputation for political censorship and sharing private data with the Chinese government, including reportedly even users' deleted messages.

ByteDance, the Chinese company responsible for TikTok, purchased the Indonesian news aggregator BaBe in 2018. BaBe then began to censor news that criticized the Chinese government. Even ostensibly private large companies like Tencent have ties to the Chinese Communist Party, including a Party Committee made up of senior company executives that exists to serve the Party-state's priorities.

Note 1 – China is using the above to shape its image throughout the region. It is committed to creating an alternative “commercial world” that includes Russia, India and the ASEAN nations, among others, but with China as the senior controlling partner. Its image is thus very important as are its investments through the BRI initiative.

Note 2 – All Chinese companies exist with the permission of the central Chinese government, including Tencent and other media organizations. In recent conversations, I have been told that China is currently creating an alternative “Internet,” controlled by China with access provided through an “Internet Passport” – issued by them.

Note 3 – Russia, with its huge land mass, (Chinese) borders, strategic materials and food resources, is an important element of futuristic Chinese strategy. Small wonder, aside from the BRICS alliance, that China will not alienate it.

Note 4 – Chinese military texts speak of the media as a “weapon” in “public opinion warfare.” In other words, Beijing seeks to use its overseas media outreach to win influence and counter what it perceives as unfairly negative narratives about China spread by Western media.

Note 5 – However, overwhelming majorities in every country – ranging from around 69 percent in Laos to nearly 98 percent in Vietnam – were “worried” about China's growing political and strategic influence.

Note 6 – China has also been incurring the political wrath of many South-eastern nations, particularly in the South China Sea area, with its aggressive sea claims and militaristic presence.

Note 7 – Social Media is rapidly becoming a means of military tactical interest. Control of the various media bodies, outlets and influence channels will be increasingly subject to governmental interest and control.

Three questions about ending the war in Ukraine - To avoid an Afghanistan situation of open-ended conflict, the US and its partners need to be thinking about how to end the conflict sooner rather than later.

To avoid an Afghanistan situation of open-ended conflict, the US and its partners need to be thinking about how to end the conflict sooner rather than later. The most likely outcome: a partition of Ukraine, with Russia controlling some aspect of the Donbas and the NATO and EU nations backing the western part of the nation.

No, that's not something that Ukraine, nor some of its more active supporters in Europe, will be happy with. But realism is needed in a situation involving nuclear warheads.

The challenge of negotiation was well laid out in a recent piece by the distinguished British historian Max Hastings.

“If one is to accept that partition is going to happen — and I believe it will — a number of still-unanswered follow-on questions appear. Here are three that need to be sorted out quickly.”

1. *“First, who should be at the negotiating table? The US and UK have been among the biggest supporters of Ukraine's fight, but they are also not part of the European Union, the body which is most likely to be the host of discussions around economic, civil and commercial support for Ukraine after a war.”*

2. **“Second, what is the role of the non-Russian controlled Ukraine in the Western power structures?** Despite efforts from Kyiv in recent years, there has been little support among either EU or NATO member states to let Ukraine in. While the EU now appears more open in the wake of Putin’s invasion, nothing is certain there, and Ukraine’s economy — the key factor for many nations’ EU membership — will likely be a shambles for years to come as a result of the invasion.”
3. **“Third, what happens in terms of arming Ukraine and how Ukraine can use that military capability?** It’s nice for the US to sit back and say we are simply arming Ukraine for its own defense, but that’s going to be a sticking point during negotiations. Statements by senior officials in the UK and the United States suggesting that Ukraine was free to attack Russian territory with the weapons being provided does nothing to help lower the risks.”

“We don’t live in a just world, and the reality remains that the longer this conflict grinds on, the greater the risk of miscalculation, misunderstanding or simply a dead-eyed assessment of how Russian forces are doing will lead to the first use of nuclear weapons in anger since 1945.”

G7 countries say they'll never recognize redrawn Ukrainian borders - G7 countries demanded Russia end its "illegal war of aggression" and said they will never recognize altered borders stemming from Moscow's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine, according to a joint statement issued Saturday.

Why it matters: While Russian President Vladimir Putin claimed at the onset of the invasion that Moscow didn't intend to occupy Ukraine, Kremlin-installed occupation authorities in certain regions have started taking steps to be illegally recognized as part of Russia.

What they're saying: "We reiterate our demand that Russia put an end to the war it started unprovoked and to end the tragic suffering and loss of life it continues to cause," the foreign ministers of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States, and the High Representative of the European Union said in a joint statement.

India bans wheat exports to try and tame prices as a scorching heatwave curtailed output - India banned wheat exports on Saturday, just days after saying it was targeting record shipments this year, as a scorching heatwave curtailed output and local prices hit an all-time high amid strong export demand.

The government said it would still allow exports for letters of credit that have already been issued and on the request from countries that are trying “to meet their food security needs.”

Global buyers were banking on the world’s second-biggest wheat producer for supplies after exports from the Black Sea region plunged following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in late February. Prior to the ban, India was targeting to ship out a record 10 million tonnes this year.

Future Bloc?

What is the future perspective of a new “Bloc” created in an arc separating East and West – a la the Christian “Schism” in 1053 AD?

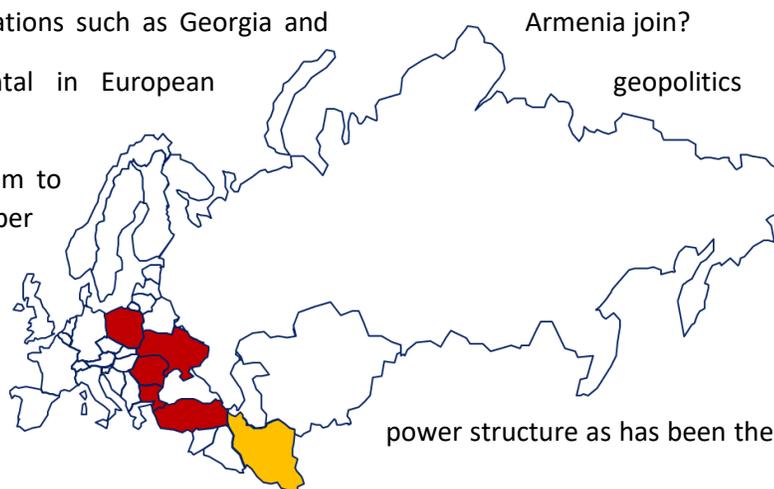
Comprised of Poland, Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey, it will straddle east and west as a new power zone.

If a possibility, will Iran, Iraq and other Caucasus nations such as Georgia and

For centuries these lands have been instrumental in European
with differing conquerors and rulers.

Will nationalist and geopolitical pressure coerce them to
join in as an alliance or other agreed political super
structure?

Particularly with Ukraine's future as an EU or NATO
member in doubt, other European and Middle East
nations of similar import and self-interest may fear a
comparable fate at the hands of an expedient global
case for centuries.



Widening of War

Amid fresh Russian claims, no trace of secret bioweapons programme - Amid new claims by Moscow of a covert biological weapons programme in Ukraine, the Director of Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) affirmed on Friday that the UN is not aware of any such programme and has neither the mandate nor the technical operational capacity to investigate it - a message first delivered to the Security Council on 11 and 18 March, by High Representative Izumi Nakamitsu. "This remains the case today," Thomas Markram said.

The Russian Federation, the United States and Ukraine are all States Parties to the 1972 Biological Weapons Convention prohibiting the development, production, acquisition, transfer, stockpiling and use of biological and toxin weapons.

Russian Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia said his country called today's meeting - the third on this topic - because it continues to receive evidence that the United States Department of Defense is carrying out dangerous biological projects of a secret military nature on the western border with his country.

"It is a real threat to the biosecurity of our country, the region and, given the cross-border nature of these bio threats, to the whole world," he said. Yet, as confirmed by Mr. Markram, neither Ukraine nor the United States has included information on this threat in the reporting stipulated by the Convention, he said.

In turn, US deputy ambassador Richard M. Mills lamented that the United Nations disarmament director had been asked to join today's "truly farcical conversation". He blamed Russia for again using the Council as a platform to spout disinformation and conspiracy theories about Ukraine as it continues its brutal and inhumane assault on the Ukrainian people.

"Russia repeatedly debases the Council through these absurd meetings," he said. Endless claims of chemical and biological weapons programs in Ukraine are categorically false and "ludicrous". In making "fanciful" assertions about poisoned bank notes, secret treatments on psychiatric prisoners and non-disclosure agreements, "it is as if the Russian delegation's talking points came from a bad spy novel," he said.

'Aggressive act': Aussie defense minister knocks Chinese intel ship 'hugging coastline' – Defense Minister Peter Dutton today revealed that a Chinese intelligence ship had entered Australia's exclusive economic zone and was "hugging the coastline" near highly classified facilities, in what he called "an aggressive act."



The PLAN (People's Liberation Army Navy) ship passed within 17 nautical miles of the Harold E Holt naval station base the Western Australia

Exmouth, which boasts a VLF transmission facility for communications with submarines. Passage that far south on the western coast clearly attracted Australia's interest. "It is an aggressive act particularly because it has come so far south — for it to come south of Exmouth is without precedent," Dutton said at his press event.

The sighting is shown in the map to the right with a red star denoting its location. Denoted in orange are Australia's huge natural underwater gas deposits, a subject of intense interest to China.

Previously deemed too expensive to extract, these offshore natural gas fields are currently under assessment, possibly vaulting Australia up the ladder of global gas suppliers.

