

Conflict Update # 292

December 12th, 2022

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Conflict Assessment

Russian losses (no update)– **94,760** (620) soldiers killed, 2,966 (+24) enemy tanks, 5,928 (+8) armored combat vehicles, 1,929 (+1) artillery systems, 397 (+2) MLRS systems, 211 (+0) air defense systems, 286 (+0) warplanes, 264 (+0) helicopters, 1,617 (+4) UAVs of the operational-tactical level, 592 (+0) cruise missiles, 16 (+0) warships/cutters, 4,544 (+4) trucks and tankers, 4 Iskander Missile Launchers (+0), 239 fuel bowsers (+0) and 169 (+2) units of equipment.

Developments

New counteroffensive looming? – Ukraine has stepped up its attacks on Russian arms depots, fuel supply lines and command posts leading to military commentary assessments of a looming counteroffensive in southern Kherson Oblast – thought to be aimed at Melitopol, the significant supply junction for all Russian forces and Crimea.

Shown below are the two Ukrainian attacks over the past weekend. The assaults on the ammunition depot in Kherson and a barracks in **2** Melitopol in Zaporizhia both reveal the real problems Russians face. **1**

The **blue-shaded** lines in the map show the only rail connections into and out of Kherson for Russian forces, illustrating how inflexible their supply lines are.

When tied to a rail connection, that is precisely what it means – “tied to.”

Russian occupation supply lines have to follow these rail links in order to move armored equipment, (heavy) loads of ammunition, troops and food.

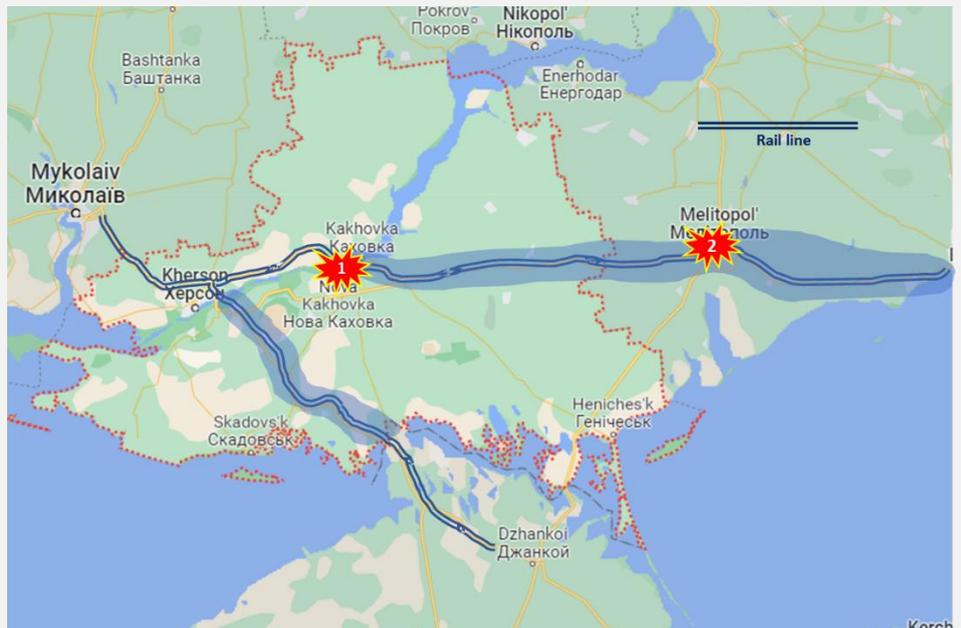
They also need to remove damaged equipment and vehicles for repair.

They are completely tied to these two principal supply routes, without which they are stranded and isolated.

Compounding this vulnerability is as trains are unloaded, equipment et al needs to be (i) stored and (ii) located close to front lines.

Ukrainian partisan groups monitor all these activities, reporting precise geo-location and movement details, which information is then coupled to satellite and other intelligence data and relayed back to Ukrainian HIMARS units.

Crews then zero in and blitz these (Russian) sites causing two effects – (i) obliteration and (ii) forced location of storage and supply points further away from the front line for safety.



This in turn creates a cascading and major problem for Russian front line BTGs in that immediate resupply lines are now extended, taking longer for replenishment munitions and stocks to arrive whilst simultaneously exposing trucks moving these requirements to incoming HIMARS attacks.

This then requires additional trucks to cover the extended resupply routes.

From Day 1 of the Russian invasion Ukraine has proven extremely adept at locating and destroying enemy food and fuel trucks, rail links and storage points.

Destroyed Russian tanks

24 Russian tanks were destroyed over the past 24 hours, indicating a Ukrainian tactical and preparatory intent in reducing enemy weaponry that poses a threat to any counter offense. This is the first major pursuit and destruction of Russian tanks and armored equipment in weeks. We will continue to watch this pattern.

Leopard II tanks

There are also reports of Leopard II tanks having arrived from Germany in preparation for the offensive. Ukrainian tank crews were in Germany during the summer for tank training – a passage of time consistent with establishment of maintenance, supply, munitions pipelines and equipment location for any counter offense and advance.

Ukraine requires armored equipment for any advance as well as firm ground for tracked and wheeled vehicles, traditionally by the mid-winter freeze in January, offering a key window for mechanized offensive operations.

Warthogs?

A question now being posed is for supply of Warthog aircraft to Ukraine for anti-tank operations against Russian BTGs. There are reports circulating of these being provided in time for later 2023 offensives. Ukrainian pilots are reported to have already been trained in the use of these effective ground attack aircraft, squadrons of which have been earmarked for desert storage by the USAF.

Bakhmut and Donetsk

Ukraine has for months been containing Russian BTGs in these areas, to where Russia relocated evacuated troops after withdrawing from western Kherson. It is reported by Ukrainian sources that home command tactics include ceding various but small non-strategic areas in order to lock enemy forces into Donetsk/Luhansk areas to dilute their battle strengths further south in Kherson, whilst simultaneously eliminating as many of their mobilized troops as possible.

Consider the trail – first Ukraine feinted an attack into Kherson, Russia fell for the ruse and relocated trained forces into this area from Kharkiv and Luhansk Oblasts to ward off what they believed was a looming assault. Instead Ukraine waited until the Kremlin had depleted its Kharkiv and Luhansk battalions sufficiently enough for them to mount a major counter offensive into Kharkiv, which is precisely what they successfully did.

Ukraine is now reversing the tactic, feinting along the Donetsk and Luhansk lines whilst publicly threatening to reach south into Mariupol. Russia saw this and reinforced these areas with troops transferred from the surrendered area in Kherson. They also mobilized and transferred thousands of newly-drafted troops in to dig trenches south of Bakhmut and north of Mariupol, moving in and stationing trained forces behind the “mobilized” lines.

Russian forces have dug in along the eastern bank of the River Dnipro in what is extremely marshy terrain. Ukraine is assaulting supply routes, command posts and communication lines behind them, isolating these troops from resupply, tactical command and relief. By destroying Russian command centers and communication lines Ukraine forces their commanders into the field to stop panicked confusion and lead from the front. They then launch assaults into these front lines, explaining why Russia has lost so many officers.

Dialogue

Over the past weekend Zelenskyy held an extended call with Joe Biden, which was followed by the latter holding a conference call with NATO and EU commanders. There is now a further call planned for this evening.

According to reports, the contents of the call(s) are of a highly secretive and strategic nature, leading one to believe that something serious and major is afoot.

Watch the moves and relocation of forces

Poland has moved tanks to their borders with Kaliningrad and Belarus, Baltic states are on high alert status, Estonia has just completed NATO exercises, Danish troops arrived in Latvia, Jens Stoltenberg, SG of NATO, last week went on record stating a distinct threat exists of the war cascading into NATO territories, US nuclear subs are (highly unusually) surfacing around the war zone, Belarus is seeing rising Russian troop training and movement within its borders, Serbia and Kosovo are engaging in belligerent actions, the American Pacific fleet has put to sea, Ukraine is striking a huge number of fuel depots and Putin has again upped his nuclear rhetoric.

Ukraine has been attacking Russian targets within Russia itself and has exposed its (Russian) air defenses as being vulnerable. Some of these attacks are believed to have been close to Russian nuclear sites, driving up their fear of further attacks and damages, not only to ground targets, but also to internal Russian opinion and concern.

China is snooping around the Middle East for oil – why? one may ask, is it because they believe or perhaps have been advised, that their Russian supply is at risk?

Putin suddenly came out again reiterating that “A New World Order” is afoot. Again, why? one may ask, is it to placate his Chinese partners in that they must not forget the ultimate outcome they both desire, so don't desert me now.

Assessment

Russia will be keenly aware of Ukraine's and Ukrainian Allies' moves and as aware of the precipitous position it is in.

Realizing this and what lies ahead, Putin is threatening nuclear use. From a military tactical viewpoint such use will be of limited effect but from a geopolitical perspective, it will be catastrophic for the Kremlin.

Any further and significant defeat for Russia in the field, such as a loss of the entire Kherson Oblast, will be extremely hard for Putin and the Kremlin to defend, placing them in a diabolical position and with little alternative other than to go for broke.

Putin, in his nuclear reference last week, alluded to the (Russian) nuclear threat the West is afraid of, and that as long as he has this threat, they will not do anything to precipitate a nuclear confrontation. He obviously views this capability as an advantage to further his geopolitical aims.

Multiple military commentators and this Update believe that Ukraine is preparing the ground for another counter offense once mid-winter sub-zero temperatures freeze the ground enabling mechanized armor movement – somewhere around mid-January 2023.

The challenge this presents is that, unlike Kharkiv and western Kherson oblast losses, there is less (Russian) meat on the bone, so the pain for them is multiplied exponentially. They literally have their backs to the wall.

Russian mercenary group's HQ destroyed in another blow to Putin – A report out of Ukraine revealed that the Wagner mercenary group's HQ,  below, has been heavily damaged in an attack, dealing another setback to Russian President Vladimir Putin's increasingly beleaguered invasion.

The report emerged out where the Wagner hotel. Luhansk Governor by Ukrainian forces, among the group's contractors the contractors die as a result according to

Wagner Group is a mercenary outfit that takes orders from the to a BBC report, and has been accused of and abuses. Over the years, it has been wartime theaters such as Crimea, Syria, Central African Republic.

This strike was far behind Russian front within Luhansk Oblast, again sending a clear no matter your location, Ukraine will be able to reach you.

This is the second Wagner HQ destroyed in six months. The previous strike saw 400 of their mercenaries killed and was located via social media photographs revealing address plates in the background.

Ukrainian military is targeting Russian fuel supply lines as winter approaches - The lifeblood of any modern army is diesel fuel. Diesel fuel is used in most military vehicles as well as in the generators that provide electricity to command posts and living facilities. Accordingly, the Russian military has required a steady flow of diesel flow to their units in Ukraine to maintain combat effectiveness. With winter approaching, the Ukrainian military appears to be making a concerted effort to cut off that flow of fuel.

Russian forces in Ukraine require a tremendous amount of diesel fuel. Modern tanks consume diesel fuel at rates of less than 1 mile per gallon. Even when the vehicles are stationary, their engines remain running to provide power to targeting equipment, radios, and other electronics. Moreover, a massive amount of diesel fuel is necessary for generators, which provide electricity to all the electronics used by any modern army.

A single Russian Battalion Tactical Group (BTG) carries approximately 10,000 gallons of fuel for resupply in its tanker trucks; this fuel is expected to support one day of combat operations. Russian logistics channels must supply fuel to over 100 BTGs in addition to a number of paramilitary groups.

The fuel issues will soon be complicated by the eastern European winter. The demand for fuel will increase as it is used in generators to provide electricity for heating in addition to being burned directly in heaters. Meanwhile, heavy snow and ice can shut down the resupply routes.

Thus far in the war, Russian forces have struggled with securing their fuel supply lines. Fuel shortages have been blamed for a number of issues including the large number of abandoned and captured Russian vehicles. Doctrinally, the Russian military is defensive in nature; as such, it is not structured to support sustained forward operations. Further, when the Russians have established forward fuel depots, they were quickly destroyed by Ukrainian artillery and drones. As a consequence, the Russians have been required to truck fuel into Ukraine from Russia.



of the city of Kadiivka in the Luhansk region, mercenary group was headquartered in a Haidai said that the hotel was struck with major losses suffered private military (PMCs). Half of are expected to of the attack, the governor.

state-sponsored Kremlin, according numerous war crimes deployed to such Libya, Mali, and the

lines and well message that

The Ukrainians have exploited this vulnerability in the Russian forces by targeting Russian fuel resupply vehicles. To date, the Russians have lost 239 fuel tankers, primarily Ural 4320 and KamAZ 6x6 tankers. This is a large number of fuel tankers, given that each Battalion Tactical Group only has five tankers. They have also destroyed several trains and civilian tankers that were carrying fuel to the front. Even one of the recent drone strikes launched into Russia targeted a fuel depot.

These efforts from the Ukrainians to deny fuel resupply to the Russian military will have large consequences on the war. Without a steady supply of diesel fuel, Russia cannot be combat effective, since they cannot maneuver their vehicles on the battlefield and their forces will be restricted to a purely defensive posture, effectively halting forward movement. Even in a defensive posture, the Russians will require a steady supply of fuel, albeit less. Without fuel, the units will be quickly overrun by the Ukrainian counteroffensive.

More importantly, without fuel, Russian soldiers will freeze. With large portions of Ukraine without power, Russian forces need diesel fuel for their generators and heaters. Without a reliable supply of fuel, they will not be able to keep their soldiers warm. Hypothermia is not the only issue; diseases will spread through the force as well. Freezing, sick soldiers have historically resulted in low morale and high desertion.

The Ukrainians will likely be successful in their efforts to diminish the Russian ability to refuel their forces. In turn, this will reduce the combat effectiveness and morale of the Russian forces. Although this will not end the war, this move will allow the Ukrainian counteroffensive to make significant gains this winter. Regardless of the overall outcome, it will probably be a cold, chaotic, and unproductive winter for the Russian forces.

Captured Russian documents reveal plan to subjugate Ukraine in 10 days and kill population - Captured Russian documents recently leaked by a British defense and security firm have revealed Putin's plan to seize Ukraine within ten days and kill the country's leadership, and their plan for Ukraine's civilians was horrifying.

Russia planned to start the invasion with a "massive missile and airstrike campaign" against Ukrainian military targets, RUSI says, with a list also showing who should be killed, who would be intimidated and who would be targeted as a collaborator.

Details of Moscow's pre-invasion plan for Ukraine have surfaced which was revealed by a British defense and security think tank. This revelation was based on the Captured Russian documents which were undersigned by Vladimir Putin. Kremlin had planned to not only take over and annex Ukraine but also to kill Ukrainian leaders, as per the Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies (RUSI).

Only selected Russian Officials were aware of this ten-day full-scale plan, stated the British Army think tank. According to RUSI, Russian intelligence had listed some of the important Ukrainian leaders, reported Sky News. Further, the defense and security think tank, UK, told that the list was divided into four categories:

- Those who should be killed
- Those in need of suppression and intimidation
- Those who are considered neutral should be encouraged to collaborate
- Those prepared to collaborate.

The think tank also shared that Russian officials planned to register the exact number of the population by scanning through door-to-door sweeps and filtration camps. The Kremlin planned the coerced cooperation of regional governors and local authorities with the Federal Security Service (FSB) which was ordered to capture local officials.

Russia's ten-day plan targeted Ukraine's power stations, airfields, the central bank, parliament, and water supplies. The revealed report by RUSI further said that Russia's 10-day plan of invasion with a massive missile and airstrike campaign

was adopted as Russia appeared to assume that Ukrainian government officials would "either flee or be captured as a result of the speed of the invasion".

According to Ukraine's intelligence community, it is believed that Russia had planned to use Belarusian airborne units to capture the Rivne and Khmelnytsky nuclear power plants. Whereas plans did not target critical infrastructure such as power stations and railways as they were crucial for the plan to occupy and annex Ukraine.

Comment – Did they ever get it wrong – see previous article “OMG – What did we do?”

Russian officials consistently conduct information operations suggesting that Belarusian conventional ground forces might join Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Belarusian leaders including Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko sometimes play along with these information operations. The purpose of these efforts is to pin Ukrainian forces at the Belarusian border to prevent them from reinforcing Ukrainian operations elsewhere in the theater. Belarus is extraordinarily unlikely to invade Ukraine in the foreseeable future whatever the course of these information operations. A Belarusian intervention in Ukraine, moreover, would not be able to do more than draw Ukrainian ground forces away from other parts of the theater temporarily given the extremely limited effective combat power at Minsk’s disposal.

The Kremlin’s efforts to pressure Belarus to support the Russian offensive campaign in Ukraine are a part of a long-term effort to cement further control over Belarus. ISW previously assessed that the Kremlin intensified pressure on Belarusian President Lukashenko to formalize Belarus’ integration into the Union State following the Belarusian 2020 and 2021 protests. Russia particularly sought to establish permanent military basing in Belarus and direct control of the Belarusian military. Russia has routinely tried to leverage its influence over Belarusian security and military affairs to place pressure on Belarus to support its invasion of Ukraine. ISW assessed that Russian Minister of Defense Army General Sergei Shoigu meet with Lukashenko on December 3 to further strengthen bilateral security ties - likely in the context of the Russian-Belarusian Union State - and increase Russian pressure on Belarus to further support the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

The Belarusian regime’s support for the Russian invasion has made Belarus a cobelligerent in the war in Ukraine. Belarusian President Lukashenko offered Belarusian territory to Russian forces for the initial staging of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Belarusian territory offered critical ground lines of communication (GLOCs) to the Russian Armed Forces in their failed drive on Kyiv and their subsequent withdrawal from northern Ukraine. ISW has previously assessed that Belarus materially supports Russian offensives in Ukraine and provides Russian forces with secure territory and airspace from which to attack Ukraine with high-precision weapons.

Belarusian support for Russia’s war in Ukraine is likely degrading the Belarusian military’s material capacity to conduct conventional military operations of its own. The Belarusian open-source Hajun Project reported on November 14 that the Belarusian military transferred 122 T-72A tanks to Russian forces, likely under the guise of sending them for modernization work in the Russian Federation.

The Hajun Project reported on November 17 that Belarus transferred 211 pieces of military equipment to Russian Armed Forces, including 98 T-72A tanks and 60 BMP-2s. The confirmed transfer of 98 T-72 tanks represents roughly 18 percent of the Belarusian inventory of active main battle tanks, according to the International Institute for Strategic Studies’ 2021 Military Balance report. It is unclear if the 98 transferred tanks are part of the 122 tanks designated for modernization or if they are a separate collection of equipment. Neither is it clear that the tanks sent to Russia were part of the active Belarusian tank park or vehicles held in storage or reserve. Belarus lacks capabilities to produce its own armored fighting vehicles making the transfer of this equipment to Russian forces both a current and a likely long-term constraint on Belarusian material capacities commit mechanized forces to the fighting in Ukraine.

Belarus is also likely drawing down its inventory of artillery munitions through munitions transfers to the Russian military. The Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported on December 3 that Belarus has been transferring 122mm and 152mm artillery ammunition to Russian Armed Forces throughout October and November.

The GUR reported on November 17 that Belarusian authorities are interested in establishing a closed cycle of production for these artillery shells and that Belarusian officials planned to meet with Iranian officials to discuss such closed production cycles of artillery munitions. The GUR also reported on October 11 that a train with 492 tons of ammunition from the Belarusian 43rd Missile and Ammunition Storage Arsenal in Gomel arrived at the Kirovske Railway Station in Crimea on an unspecified date.

Belarusian officials are likely trying to conceal the amount of military equipment they are sending to Russia to support its invasion of Ukraine. The Hajun Project reported on November 5 that the Belarusian State Security Committee, Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the Belarusian Special Forces have instituted enhanced protection and surveillance of rail infrastructure and have banned trains carrying military equipment from passing through Belarusian cities.

Belarusian authorities likely are trying to prevent Western and Ukrainian intelligence agencies from fully assessing that extent of the Belarusian military equipment transfers to Russia. Belarus may be sending more extensive amounts of military equipment to Russian forces. Belarusian authorities may also be attempting to hide the extent of the transfers in order to mitigate the possible backlash against Lukashenko's degradation of the country's military capacity and subservience to Moscow.

The Belarusian military is likely facing constraints on its capacity to train current and new personnel due to its supporting role in Russian force generation efforts. The Belarusian military is continuing to train Russian mobilized military personnel at the 230th Combined Arms Obuz-Lesnovsky Training Ground in Brest, Belarus and at other training facilities near Mozyr, Gomel, and Mogilev in Belarus as part of the Union States's Regional Grouping of Forces (RGV). The Belarusian Ministry of Defense reportedly drafted 10,000 conscripts into the Belarusian Armed forces as a part of its autumn conscription campaign, a similar number to those drafted in the autumn cycle in 2021. Training of these mobilized Russian servicemembers coincides with the start of the Belarusian military's academic year. The GUR reported on September 29 that Belarus was preparing to accommodate up to 20,000 mobilized Russian servicemembers. The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported on November 25 that 12,000 Russian personnel were stationed in Belarus. ISW previously assessed that Russian forces deployed the mobilized men for training in Belarus as part of the RGV due to Russia's degraded training capacity.

The Belarusian military likely has a relatively limited capacity to train existing and new personnel since it has only six maneuver brigades and is comprised of roughly 45,000 active personnel split into two command headquarters. It's small military likely has limited training capacity and infrastructure to support its own force generation efforts.

Belarusian military officials are now responsible for training at least twice as many servicemembers as it normally trains. Belarusian support for Russian force generation efforts would likely also constrain it from being able to train more Belarusian military personnel if Lukashenko wished to increase the number of drafted conscripts in the next conscription cycle to prepare for possible losses in combat following a putative Belarusian invasion of Ukraine.

The degradation of the Russian military through devastating losses in Ukraine would also hinder deployment of Belarusian mechanized forces to fight alongside Russian troops. Belarusian forces should theoretically be able to operate in combined units with Russian mechanized forces. ISW previously assessed that Russia pursued efforts to integrate the Belarusian military into Russian-led structures in joint military exercises and permanent joint combined combat training centers before the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

The Belarusian military coordinated with the Russian military in the Zapad-2021 joint exercises in September of 2021 in which Russian and Belarusian units formed joint "mobile tactical groups" that operated as single military units at the

battalion level. These combined units require a high degree of coordination and military training, and therefore Russian and Belarusian forces used elite units in such efforts. Russian units that took part in the joint exercises with Belarusian forces included elements of the 1st Guards Tank Army, the 76th Guards Air Assault Division, the 20th Combined Arms Army, the 31st Guards Air Assault Brigade, and the 106th Guards Airborne Division, all elite units that **ISW has assessed have been severely degraded in Ukraine.**

These Russian units now likely lack the capability to operate in combined formations with Belarusian forces and unable to operate effectively in combined operations. Belarusian forces would have to operate together with poorly trained mobilized Russian personnel if they entered the war in Ukraine. The outcome of efforts to form and use such combined units in combat is likely to be poor.



Ukrainian forces repel attacks in Donetsk, Luhansk: Kyiv - In its daily update, Ukraine's General Staff says its forces have repelled Russian assaults on four settlements in the Donetsk region and eight settlements in Luhansk.

Russia continued fighting in Bakhmut and launched two missile attacks against civilian infrastructure in Kostyantynivka, in the Donetsk region.

Elsewhere, Russian forces carried out more than 60 attacks from rocket salvo systems lobbed at the civilian infrastructure in Kherson and Ukrainian troops based there.

Ukrainian forces have also made “14 strikes” on Russian forces as well as raids on Russia’s anti-aircraft missile complex.

“During the current day, the aviation of the Defence Forces made 14 strikes on the areas of concentration of personnel, weapons and military equipment, as well as a strike on the positions of the enemy’s anti-aircraft missile complex,” the General Staff said.

Ukraine repels Russian assaults in Bakhmut as battle reaches impasse - Ukrainian forces have repelled assaults near the city of Bakhmut as the battle for it results in a deadlock, according to a report from the Institute for the Study of War (ISW).

On Saturday, the ISW said that the Ukrainian General Staff claimed that Moscow-backed forces were repelled near Bakhmut in Ukraine's Donetsk region.

The report said assaults on towns and villages within 13 miles of the city had been pushed back, citing Russian blogs written by military service members or milbloggers.

Comment – Russian reports stated that their forces had captured the city of Bakhmut, whereas here we can see from satellite imagery and from Ukrainian sources that this is not the case. Russian reports and communiqués require verification as to their veracity on an ongoing basis.

Lukashenko’s support for Russia’s war in Ukraine and Russian pressure on Belarus to join the fighting are causing friction within the Belarusian military. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on December 7 that soldiers of the Belarusian border service and the Belarusian Armed Forces are increasingly dissatisfied with the activities of the Belarusian military-political leadership due to the threat of Belarus entering the war in Ukraine.

Ukrainian sources reported November 13 that social tensions between Belarusians and Russian forces in Brest Oblast intensified as Russian forces strained local hospitals due to unsanitary conditions at the 230th Combined Arms Obuz-Lesnovsky Training Ground. The GUR reported on November 6 that internal memos from senior Belarusian military officers show numerous complaints from rank-and-file Belarusian servicemen about tensions with Russian mobilized personnel, particularly in relation to derogatory ethnic statements.

Belarusian personnel are certainly aware of the significant losses that Russian forces suffered in Ukraine and likely do not wish to experience the same result. An October 25 CNN report detailed how Belarusian military and hospitals treated many Russian casualties as the Russian military offensive to capture Kyiv failed. Belarusian units that trained with elite Russian units that have since suffered heavy losses fighting in Ukraine are also likely aware of the extent of the casualties that the Russian army has faced in Ukraine. These Belarusian units likely know that their units and the Belarusian military as a whole would not fare better than Russian units that were far more capable and well-trained.

Elements within the Belarusian military have shown resistance to the idea of entering the war in Ukraine. A Belarusian lieutenant colonel posted a viral video on February 27 in which he called upon Belarusian military personnel to refuse orders if instructed to enter the war in Ukraine. It is likely that some elements of the Belarusian Armed Forces would express reluctance or outright refusal if Lukashenko decided to invade Ukraine.

Comment – At the onset of the Russian invasion in February, the majority of Russian “elite” troops were absolutely decimated, wiped out entirely in some cases. Those surviving the Ukrainian onslaught walked back to Belarus to escape death or injury at the hands of Ukrainian battle groups, or at the very least, to get food.

It is far stretch of the imagination to picture these soldiers returning to Belarus on foot and not explaining to their “hosts” what had happened and where the remainder of their colleagues were.

These messages and other “bad” news items would have resonated throughout the Belarussian military and inspired the fear of God in them about joining Russia in its “special military operation” in Ukraine.

Lukashenko will similarly have taken note of these developments and as the military is his only guarantee of safely remaining in power, there is no logic in sending them to their deaths south of the border.

Lukashenko’s setting of information conditions likely further constrains Belarusian willingness to enter the war. Lukashenko continues to set informational conditions to resist Russian pressure to enter the war in Ukraine by claiming that NATO is preparing to attack Belarus. He would likely struggle to set information conditions justifying Belarusian military involvement to the south in Ukraine that did not obviously contradict the supposed threat of NATO forces to the west that he has framed to the Belarusian public. Belarusian officials’ repeated invocations of the threat of NATO may have also instilled a misguided belief among some Belarusian government and military officials that a defensive posture in western Belarus is essential.

Belarus is already unlikely to invade Ukraine due to internal dynamics within the country. ISW has previously assessed that Lukashenko does not intend to enter the war in Ukraine due to the possibility of renewed domestic unrest if his security apparatus weakened through participation in a costly war in Ukraine. He relied upon elements of the armed forces in addition to security services to quell popular protests against his rule in 2020 and 2021. Committing a substantial amount of that security apparatus to the war in Ukraine would likely leave him open to renewed unrest and resistance. Lukashenko is also likely aware that invading Ukraine would undermine his credibility as the leader of a sovereign country as it would be evident that Russia’s effort to secure full control of Belarus had succeeded.

Belarusian entry in the war would at worst force Ukraine to temporarily divert manpower and equipment from current front lines. Ukrainian General Staff Deputy Chief Hromov stated on November 24 that 15,000 Belarusian military personnel, in addition to the 9,000 Russian personnel stationed in Belarus, could theoretically participate in the war with Ukraine. Even if Lukashenko committed a substantially larger number of his forces to an offensive into Ukraine, his military would still be a small force that would be unable to achieve any substantial operational success. ISW has previously assessed that a Russian or Belarusian offensive from Belarus would not be able to cut Ukrainian logistical lines to the West without projecting deeper into Ukraine than Russian forces did during the Battle of Kyiv, when Russian forces were at their strongest. A Belarusian invasion could not make such a drive, nor it could it seriously threaten Kyiv. Belarus’ entry into the war would at worst divert Ukrainian forces away from current front lines in eastern Ukraine.

Belarus will continue to help Russia fight its war in Ukraine even though Lukashenko is highly unlikely to send his army to join the fighting. Belarus can offer material to Russia that Russia cannot otherwise source due to international sanctions regimes against the Russian Federation that do not impact Belarus. Belarusian provision of territory and airspace allows Russian forces to support their offensive operations in Ukraine and conduct their strikes on Ukrainian civilian targets from a safe haven.

Comment – It remains to be seen whether and when Ukraine will strike into Belarus in retaliation for airborne assaults against Ukrainian infrastructure by Russian aircraft using their airspace. On the other hand, there may well have been “silent” backroom chatter between Zelenskyy and Lukashenko regarding the outcome of Belarus joining the Russian invasion.

The Russian MoD denied rumors General Valery Gerasimov resigned or was removed from his position as Chief of the General Staff.

Ukrainian and Russian sources reported that fighting continues along the Svatove-Kreminna line and near Lyman amidst poor weather conditions.

A milblogger claimed Russian forces transferred over 200 pieces of equipment from the Kherson direction to the Kupyansk direction, and geolocated footage shows Russian T-90 tanks in Luhansk Oblast headed west. A Ukrainian official stated that a larger Russian force grouping does not currently pose a threat. (**Comment** – Evidence of the attrition rate in equipment).

Russian forces made marginal territorial gains around Bakhmut as Russian and Ukrainian sources reported continued fighting in the area. A Ukrainian Armed Forces Eastern Group spokesperson stated that Russian forces changed tactics from using battalion tactical groups (BTGs) to smaller assault groups for offensive actions.

Russian and Ukrainian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces struck Skadovsk, Hola Prystan, Oleshky, and Nova Kakhovka, Kherson Oblast, all along major Russian logistics lines.

Russian and Ukrainian sources reported that Ukrainian forces struck a Russian military base in Melitopol, Zaporizhia Oblast.[45] One source claimed that the strike killed up to 200 Russian military personnel.[46]

Ukrainian officials reported that Russian occupation authorities intensified forced mobilization measures in occupied Ukraine. Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces face shortages of blood for wounded military personnel and are running donor drives in occupied Crimea. (**Comment** – The Kremlin is trying as hard as possible to recruit from occupied territories in order that they can contain the fallout from Russian families regarding casualties. This way they can force people from the occupied towns into their army at gunpoint and send them to the front).

A Ukrainian partisan group claimed responsibility for setting fire to a Russian military barracks in Sovietske, Crimea.[49] Ukrainian and Russian officials reported that Russian authorities continued filtration and law enforcement crackdowns in occupied Ukraine.

Putin

Putin cancels annual year-end news conference - The break in tradition comes as Russia's war in Ukraine falters and its economy struggles under the weight of sanctions.

Putin will not hold a year-end news conference this year, the Kremlin has said, suspending an annual tradition that dates back to the early years of his presidency.

"There will not be [a news conference] before the New Year," Kremlin spokesman Peskov earlier today, but noted Putin "regularly speaks to the press, including on foreign visits."

Peskov gave no reason for not holding the marathon conference that usually lasts several hours, but Kremlin observers view it as a break with protocol due to Russia's war in Ukraine, which began in February.

There would also be no New Year reception at the Kremlin, officials said, at a time when Russia's war in Ukraine has not gone according to plan.

Comment – What is he afraid of?, Too much personal exposure? Many pictures exist of Putin in meetings where he sits at the opposite end of an extremely long table whilst all others sit down table from him, separated by approximately 40 feet. Now he is not even meeting.

Sanctions

Russian oil insurer will not offer new policies after EU import ban - Russian insurer Ingosstrakh says it has no plans to offer policies to new clients who may lose coverage from international insurers after restrictions against Russian oil came into force on December 5.

The European Union banned all seaborne Russian crude imports, with a fuel import ban to follow in February.

They also banned companies and individuals in the bloc from providing financing, brokerage, shipping and insurance services to ship Russian oil elsewhere if the crude was bought above a price cap of \$60 a barrel.

Turkey's maritime authority said on Thursday it would continue to block the passage of oil tankers without appropriate insurance letters, adding that the insurance checks on ships in its waters were a routine procedure.

"We are not willing and will not provide short-term P&I (Protection and Indemnity) coverage for vessels caught up by the new Turkish regulations at the mouth of the Bosphorus," Ingosstrakh said.

Diplomacy

The United States is prioritizing efforts to boost Ukraine's air defences, President Biden told President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

Turkish President Erdogan discussed the Black Sea grain export agreement with the leaders of Russia and Ukraine, as both sides seek changes that would boost their exports.

European Union foreign ministers meet on Monday to try to agree on further sanctions on Russia and Iran and an additional \$2.11bn for arms deliveries to Ukraine.

There are no peace talks and no end in sight to the deadliest conflict in Europe since World War II.

An international team of legal advisers has been working with local prosecutors in Ukraine's recaptured city of Kherson in recent days as they gather evidence of alleged sexual crimes by Russian forces.

Russia's ambassador to Moscow said Britain's royal family was recommended not to have any contact with the Russian embassy in London, the Izvestia newspaper reported.

Emergency crews are working to ease power shortages in many parts of Ukraine after Russian attacks, particularly the Black Sea port of Odesa, Zelenskyy said.

Russia to be invited to US APEC meeting - A US official says Russia will be invited to attend meetings of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) bloc hosted by the United States next year.

As "good stewards of APEC," the United States will invite Russia, which is a member of the 21-country bloc, Matt Murray, a senior US official for APEC, told a media briefing in Singapore.

At an APEC meeting hosted by Thailand in May, representatives from the United States and some other countries walked out of a meeting to protest Russia's actions in Ukraine when Russian Economy Minister Maksim Reshetnikov was delivering remarks.

Russia slams US approach to Ukraine - Russia has accused the US of an unhelpful approach to diplomatic talks in Istanbul, as the Turkish city remains the neutral meeting point for the two countries.

“Istanbul is a convenient place for such contacts,” Russian Deputy FM Vershinin was quoted as saying by the RIA Novosti news agency.

“I can say that any contacts are useful, but, unfortunately, we do not see a constructive approach from the American side aimed at concrete results,” Vershinin said.

Last month, a meeting between US CIA Director William Burns and Sergey Naryshkin, the head of Russia’s SVR foreign intelligence service, in Ankara triggered speculation about back-channel talks between Moscow and Washington.

President Vladimir Putin said last week that US President Joe Biden requested the CIA meeting and that the CIA-SVR contacts were continuing.

Russian and US diplomats also met in Istanbul on Friday to discuss several technical issues in their relationship, such as visas.

Impacts

Businesses relocating from Russia - Kazakh Prime Minister Smailyov says 19 international companies have relocated from Russia to Kazakhstan since Moscow launched its unprovoked invasion of Ukraine in late February, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty reported.

He said on Monday that other international companies were currently in talks with Astana regarding possible relocation from Russia to the oil-rich Central Asian country.

Smailyov said earlier that about 300 foreign companies had expressed a willingness to relocate from Russia to Kazakhstan. Several international companies, including Honeywell, InDriver, Fortescue, and Marubeni have already said they have moved to Kazakhstan.

Massive fires in Russia - A massive fire has gutted a shopping mall on Moscow’s eastern outskirts, the second such blaze in four days, The Associated Press reported.

Monday’s blaze at the mall in Balashikha that trades in construction items and decorative materials first erupted at a storage area and later spread to part of the building. The fire teams managed to localize it in an area of about 9,000 square meters (about 97,000 square feet) and prevent it from engulfing the entire mall. Officials said the fire was caused by a short circuit that came amid heavy rain in Moscow.

The blaze follows Friday’s fire that destroyed the huge OBI construction materials store, part of the MEGA shopping mall in Khimki, on the Russian capital’s northwestern outskirts.

Russians in Bulgaria - While a number of Russians in Bulgaria are helping refugees, a large swathe of the Balkan nation remains resolutely pro-Russian. And the Bulgarian government has often been less than welcoming when it comes to providing accommodation and support, forcing many Ukrainians to leave.

Of the some 932,000, who fled to Bulgaria since the invasion, only some 51,000 remain with less than 10,000 put up by the state, according to official data. Agence France-Presse has this story about some Russians helping Ukrainian refugees in Bulgaria.

Humanitarian

More refugees from Ukraine - The head of the Norwegian Refugee Council said on Monday he anticipates another wave of hundreds of thousands of refugees from Ukraine in Europe over the winter, because of "unlivable" conditions,

Reuters reported - "Nobody knows how many but there will be hundreds of thousands more as the horrific and unlawful bombing of civilian infrastructure makes life unlivable in too many places," Jan Egeland told Reuters by phone after returning from a trip to Ukraine earlier this month.

"So I fear that the crisis in Europe will deepen and that will overshadow equally crises in other places of the world," he said.

Containment

Ukraine has defused over 300,000 explosives - Since the beginning of Russia's full-scale military invasion, at least 302,802 explosives and 2,891 kilogram of explosives, including 2,155 aircraft-delivered bombs, have been neutralized, Ukraine's State Emergency Service reports.

The EU Council said Saturday that it reached an agreement on a "legislative package that will enable the EU to help Ukraine financially throughout 2023 with 18 billion euros." The proposal will be submitted to the European Parliament "for possible adoption" next week, The Kyiv Independent reported.

To assist Ukraine with paying for essential public services, maintaining macroeconomic stability, and restoring critical infrastructure destroyed by Russian attacks, the European Commission proposed an 18 billion euro support package earlier on Nov. 9.

EU tops up arms fund – EU foreign ministers agreed to replenish a fund that has been used to pay for military support for Ukraine with another two billion euros (\$2.11bn).

There is a possibility of another boost later, with the total increase until 2027 amounting to up to 5.5 billion euros, said the European Council.

"Today's decision will ensure that we have the funding to continue delivering concrete military support to our partners' armed forces," EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said in a statement.

Britain 'open-minded' about sending long range weapons to Ukraine - British defence minister Ben Wallace says he would be "open minded" about supplying Ukraine with long range weapons systems if Russia continues targeting civilian areas.

Speaking to parliament, Wallace was asked by former PM Boris Johnson, a vocal supporter of Ukraine, about the possible supply of longer-range missile systems to Kyiv to destroy or damage drone launch sites.

"I constantly review the weapons systems we could provide," Wallace told parliament.

"We too have in our armour potential weapons systems that are longer, and should the Russians continue to target civilian areas and try and break those Geneva Conventions, then I will be open minded to see what we do next," he said.

Since the invasion, Britain has committed 3.8 billion dollars (\$4.6 billion) to supporting Ukraine, which includes military training, weapons and humanitarian assistance.

EU threatens to keep billions from Hungary over Ukraine veto - Germany reminds Hungary of the importance of the EU's values as the bloc threatens to keep billions from Budapest unless it lifts its veto on a joint loan to Ukraine and a global corporate tax.

Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock's comments add pressure ahead of a meeting on Monday of the EU's national ambassadors to try to break the deadlock.

The EU has withheld 5.8 billion euros from an economic stimulus pot citing poor judicial independence in Hungary, and a further 7.5 billion euros they said should be frozen over corruption.

But, Hungary blocked the 18 billion euros joint EU loan to Ukraine and the tax plan, drawing ire from other countries for what they said was an attempt to blackmail the bloc into releasing the funds to Budapest.

Hungary says it opposes joint EU borrowing to support Ukraine but that it would extend bilateral aid to Kyiv instead.

Nestle to invest in new production facility in Ukraine - Nestle will invest 40 million Swiss francs (\$42.88m) in launching a new production facility in western Ukraine, the company said.

“This is an important move for Nestlé, taken in a very challenging time for the country,” Alessandro Zanelli, Nestlé’s chief executive officer for the South Eastern Europe Market, said in a statement.

“We aim to create a food and culinary hub, ensuring incremental jobs and serving the needs of Ukrainians and all European citizens with high-quality products.”

Nestle is one of the few international companies to announce new investments in Ukraine since Russia invaded the country in February.

The company already has around 5,800 staff in Ukraine and plans to add 1,500 jobs at the new production facility in Smolyhiv in the Volyn region.

Ukrainian PM appeals for Patriot missile batteries - Ukraine’s prime minister appeals for Patriot missile batteries and other hi-tech air defence systems to counter Russian attacks.

Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal told French broadcaster LCI that Russia wants to swamp Europe with a new wave of Ukrainian refugees by taking down infrastructure that has caused electricity and water outages for millions during freezing winter.

The provision of Patriot surface-to-air missiles to Ukraine would mark a significant advance in the air defence systems the West is sending to help the country defend itself from Russian aerial attacks.

So far, no country has offered them, although Germany has provided Patriot missiles to neighboring Poland, its NATO ally.

Ukrainians could fill jobs in the Czech arms industry - A Czech defence official says highly trained Ukrainian workers could fill thousands of job vacancies in the Czech arms industry to help meet demand triggered by the war.

The Czech Republic has been one of the top weapons providers to Kyiv among NATO allies, but deliveries have badly depleted inventories, and officials have warned it could take years to restock.

“(There) will be thousands of jobs,” Deputy Defence Minister Tomas Kopečný said on Czech Radio, suggesting that workers could come from Ukraine.

“It depends on how the production capacities of Czech companies, or the production of joint Czech-Ukrainian arms factories will be increased.”

Kopečný said Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala had agreed to take in Ukrainian weapons experts when he met Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Kyiv in October.