

# Conflict Update # 27

April 12<sup>th</sup>, 2022

## Conflict Assessment

**Putin has purged more than 100 FSB agents** in apparent retaliation amid Ukraine invasion quagmire - Russia's invasion of Ukraine appears not to be going according to plan, and President Vladimir Putin seems intent on blaming his old colleagues at the Federal Security Bureau (FSB) – the intelligence agency successor to the KGB – for the quagmire.

Putin reportedly purged more than 100 agents from the FSB, and his government sent the head of the department responsible for Ukraine to prison.

About 150 FSB officers have been dismissed, The Times of London reported Monday. The ousted agents belonged to the Fifth Service, a division that Putin – then director of the FSB – set up in 1998 in order to carry out operations in the countries of the former Soviet Union, aiming to keep those countries in Russia's orbit.



**Capturing Mariupol**, the main eastern port, would allow Moscow to link troops advancing from the east with those from Russian-annexed Crimea in the south and shift their focus to a new attempt to encircle the main Ukrainian force in the east.

Ukrainian marines have already said they are preparing for a 'last battle' to control Mariupol after being surrounded by invading Russian forces.

The 36th marine brigade of the Ukrainian armed forces said on Facebook that anyone whose limbs have not been torn off will be ordered to fight, and battles are currently being carried out by cooks, drivers and musicians.

They said earlier today: 'Today will probably be the last battle, as the ammunition is running out. 'It's death for some of us, and captivity for the rest,' it added, saying it had been 'pushed back' and 'surrounded' by the Russian army.

**Change in battle plan by Russia** – Russia's renewed offensive in the east is a different battle zone to what has transpired to date. Here there will be a broad front initiated by long-range artillery and rocket fire, followed by ground invasions.

They will attack across open countryside, alleviating the "urban quagmires" they saw in earlier fights. This may give the Russians an upper hand in that it will be sheer mass of weaponry as opposed to long lines of convoys attacking across multiple fronts and decimated by Ukrainian shoot and scoot tactics.

They will also have a unified command structure. For how long though remains to be seen as Ukraine has large stocks of mobile anti-tank weaponry and highly-motivated soldiers fighting for their very existence.

Should Ukraine manage to get in amongst the Russians, whose eastern attack they have been planning for since 2014, they can create havoc and further demoralize raw and ill-prepared enemy ranks.

What the Russians will be hoping for is to draw out Ukrainian forces in order to combat them a la Kursk in 1943, seen alongside.

Drawing Ukrainian field armor into the open, exposes them to air attack, of which the Russians have superiority in numbers.

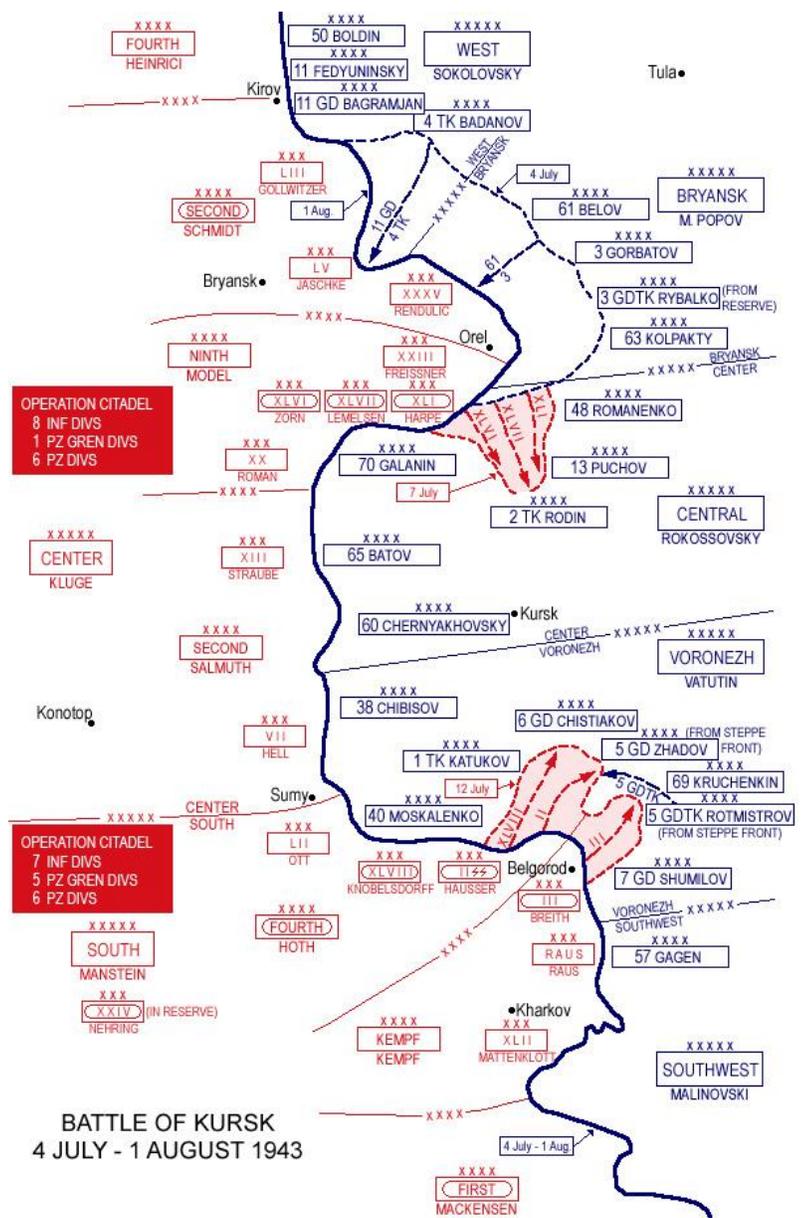
Ukraine will look to expose Russian supply lines, taking out fuel lines and ammunition re-supply operations.

Putin loses this front, and he may as well retire to Sochi in the Black Sea. The enormity of the new front has not been lost on NATO and the West.

See map further below as to Putin's possible tactical moves.

**Russia 'unleashes chemical weapons on Mariupol'** - Russia is feared to have unleashed chemical weapons on Mariupol after reports Ukrainians were targeted by a toxic agent dropped from a drone, as Liz Truss vowed to hold Putin to account over the potential attack.

Unverified reports from the besieged southern port city's Azov regiment said a 'poisonous substance of unknown origin' was released on Monday, causing breathing issues, 'respiratory failure' and 'vestibulo-atactic syndrome'.



Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said her department is working with partners to verify the claims, which pro-Russian separatist forces have denied. He projected that they inherited the land and culture because the previous Britons were unfit to live there.

**Russian President Vladimir Putin** is understood to be preparing to double or even treble his number of forces in the eastern Donbas region. He has to prepare for the annual May Day Parade through Moscow in order to project a “win” of sorts that he can spin to the Russian people at large.

The effects and enormity of Russian losses and fatalities have yet to register among the Russian people.

Referring to the battle map alongside, is Putin planning to move regrouped troops and forces first east and out of Ukraine, then south and back into the country to cut off remaining Ukrainian forces in the Mariupol region?

Should he succeed, then expect Russian forces to again regroup and push west.

Western officials believe that Russian battalion tactical groups (BTGs), each with up to 1,000 troops, are heading towards Donbas to reinforce forces already stationed there.



While Moscow has lost nearly 40 BTGs in the fighting so far, as many as 90 remain committed to the Kremlin’s ‘special military operation’.

Russia already holds most of the territory in the Luhansk and Donetsk regions but the Kremlin is seeking to seize the whole area before any further peace talks.

But, regardless of these reinforcements, it is unclear how Russia will overcome morale issues. It was low to begin with but morale is much lower now. Any losses of significant proportion and once again, there will follow Russian troop dissent and disobedience.

Putin meets Lauksneko of Belarus today, and may be pushing him to send Belarussian forces into northern Ukraine so as to split Ukrainian forces and engage them on multiple fronts.

This though will expose Lukashenko to an internal uprising, something he fears most, maintaining power in Belarus through control of the military. Should he now move his “policing arm” into Ukraine, he fears what happens in the vacuum left behind. He is keenly aware hereof, as are internal Belarussian opposition forces.

**Preparing for the Unthinkable in Ukraine** - Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has not gone as the Kremlin imagined, with its forces bogged down around key cities and the Ukrainian army providing stiff resistance. As its troops grow demoralized and its supplies are exhausted, Russia may turn to more drastic measures to win. In Washington, U.S. national security officials are already meeting and planning for a growing possibility that was once unthinkable: that Russia might use biological and chemical weapons in Ukraine. (Foreign Affairs).

**Satellites** - Another big item on the Russian list of problems: satellites -- there are too few of them, and too few with high-quality capabilities. "In principle, Russia is already practically blind in orbit," said Bart Hendrix, a Brussels-based analyst and expert on Soviet and Russian space programs.

According to experts and open-source information compiled by RFE/RL, Russia has long been saddled with a small and inadequate fleet of communications and surveillance satellites that in many cases rely on either outdated technology or imported parts that are now harder to come by due to Western sanctions.

Ukraine has no satellite fleet of its own. But it has benefited greatly not only from the unprecedented amount of weaponry and military equipment that the United States has supplied, but also from an unprecedented amount of intelligence, including real-time data on Russian troop movements.

**Key Russian railway bridge destroyed in Belgorod near border with Ukraine** - A key Russian railway bridge has been damaged in the border region with Ukraine in a potential act of sabotage – as Russia relies on its railroads to shift its attacking forces in preparation for a massive assault on eastern Ukraine.

Russia relies heavily on rail to move its military equipment. The bridge sits just four miles from the border on a rail line that goes south into Ukraine and lies on a supply line between Russia and the territory it holds close to the city of Izyum near the Donbas.

## Financial

**Russian cash flow** - During the first quarter, the Russian Federation posted a record surplus in its current account — a broad measure of its trade with the world — as surging energy prices translated into a gusher of export revenues.

- The surplus for the first three months of 2022 rose to \$58.2 billion, from \$22.5 billion during the first quarter last year, according to figures published yesterday by the Russian central bank.
- The Institute of International Finance, a research group, projects that Russia will post a record \$250 billion surplus this year.
- A surplus of that size could essentially make up for the entirety of the Russian central bank reserves that Western powers froze through sanctions, says Elina Ribakova, deputy chief economist at IIF.

While Russia remains effectively severed from much of the world economy by Western sanctions, its big account surplus means it can get the money it needs to finance its war, pay government employees, and stabilize its currency by intervening in foreign exchange markets.

A large current account surplus doesn't mean that the Russian economy, or its population, is thriving. The surplus — exports minus imports — in part reflects the fact that imports into the country have fallen sharply.

**Ruble falls** - The Russian ruble has weakened sharply after the country's central bank decided to relax some of the temporary capital control measures aimed at limiting a drop in the currency brought on by crippling sanctions imposed by the international community on Moscow for its unprovoked invasion of Ukraine.

## Technology

**Ukrainians discover canon DSLR in camera array of dismantled Russian drone** – The ministry of defense in Ukraine recently released a video showing a Ukrainian soldier dismantling a Russian military surveillance drone. Standard stuff perhaps, but what is interesting is that the camera that is being used inside is a good old low-end Canon DSLR.

It shows a soldier sitting next to what it says is a Russian Orlan-10 unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) that had crashed in Ukraine, and comments on how surprisingly low-tech the whole device is.

The heart of the surveillance device is a Canon EOS Rebel T6i (AKA 750D), a DSLR that came out in 2015 and you can now pick up the body only for a few hundred dollars. The camera is held in place by nothing more than a bit of Velcro. The mode dial has been glued into a fixed position, presumably to avoid accidental changes.

There are two other cameras visible. There isn't any info on those, but we can surmise that in the image above the one on the bottom left is probably an FPV camera transmitting to a monitor or goggles on the ground, whilst the other is most likely to be some kind of infrared camera.

For a piece of equipment reportedly costing a total of \$87,000 and \$120,000 a unit, why on earth would they be using something as heavy and clunky as a cheap Canon DSLR?

## Widening of Conflict

**Putin warns the West: Russia cannot be isolated – or held back** – President Vladimir Putin says he has no doubts Russia will achieve all of its objectives in Ukraine – a conflict he cast as both inevitable and essential to defend Russia in the long term.

President Vladimir Putin warned the West on Tuesday, April 12, that attempts to isolate Moscow would fail, citing the success of the Soviet space program as evidence that Russia could achieve spectacular leaps forward in tough conditions.

Russia says it will never again depend on the West after the United States and its allies imposed crippling sanctions on it to punish Putin for his February 24 order for what he called a “special military operation” in Ukraine.

“We don't intend to be isolated,” Putin said. “It is impossible to severely isolate anyone in the modern world – especially such a vast country as Russia.”

**S-500: Russia's Plan To Shootdown F-22 And F-35 Fighters In A NATO War?** - Russia's mighty S-500 SAM system is one to be reckoned with – if you are following the war in Ukraine, undoubtedly you have heard about a no-fly zone. So far, NATO allies have avoided this tactic in order to refrain from becoming directly involved in the conflict. So Ukrainians have relied on the antiquated S-300 surface-to-air missile system to help patrol the skies.

But this is not the full story. The Russians have concurrently leapt ahead with their S-500 SAM system which is nicknamed the Prometheus and it is certainly mighty in its capabilities – even better than the already powerful S-400 Triumf SAM battery.

The S-500 is still being developed by the Russians, but it will make their air defense umbrella over their country much more effective. They began work on the system in 2010. Their air defense artillery forces wanted something with an ultra-long range and high ceiling – something that can attack against low-flying satellites, not to mention every enemy airplane under the sun, including drones. The S-500 would also defend against ballistic and cruise missiles. The Russians plan to have missiles for each one of these missions – anti-aircraft, anti-missile, and anti-satellite.

**Transnistria**, the breakaway Slavic-majority region in Moldova, usually attracts attention only when Moscow seeks to use it to limit Moldovan moves toward unification with Romania or membership in European institutions. At times, analysts also point to it as an illustrative model for Russian expansion or Moscow's designs on other breakaway regions across the former Soviet space. But now, President Vladimir Putin's full-scale war in Ukraine is elevating Transnistria's importance in at least four ways. The Russian-occupied region may (i) be a new source of troops for Moscow's invading forces, (ii) it is being considered as a potential base for a Russian attack on Odesa, (iii) the territory could see its future

as a partially recognized statelet on the model of the Donetsk and Luhansk “peoples republics” (DPR, LPR) in Ukraine and (iv) the Kremlin may even see Transnistria as, ultimately, a component of a new Russian empire.

Rumors have been circulating about the possibility of Russian provocations against Ukraine from Transnistria, although both Transnistrian and Moldovan officials have tried to dismiss them. Russia has been trying to recruit soldiers from Transnistria to supplement falling numbers elsewhere.

Meanwhile, three other developments have further muddied the waters, increasing the likelihood that Transnistria will play some (for now uncertain) role in the Russian assault on Ukraine or more broadly. **First**, officials in Transnistria demanded that the Moldovan government immediately enter into talks about a civilized “divorce” and that the international community recognize it as an independent state, lest events in Ukraine lead to provocations by Moldova or the use of Ukrainian forces against it (Politobzor.net).

**Second**, Russia’s advance into Ukraine has had the effect of reducing the ability of shadowy figures in Transnistria to continue their black market East-West trade.

And **third**, Russian commentators are outlining several possible futures for Transnistria—conspicuously employing more expansive language than they have used since the 1990s.

**Russia ‘moves military equipment’ towards Finland after warnings over joining NATO** - Russia is reportedly moving military equipment towards its border with Finland – hundreds of miles away from Ukraine.

Support for NATO membership has grown in the Nordic nation since Ukraine was invaded.

Prime Minister Sanna Marin said possible membership would be discussed ‘within the coming weeks’.

But alarming new footage has now emerged, which seems to show a dramatic display of aggression from Russia.

Military equipment, including coastal defense systems, have been seen on the road from Russia toward Helsinki.

The Daily Mail reports the missiles form the K-300P Bastion-P mobile coastal defense system, designed to ‘take out surface ships up to and including aircraft carrier battle groups.’

Last night, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov warned expansion of NATO would ‘not bring stability’ to Europe.

## Impacts

**Russia Aims Its Ultimate ‘Revenge Plan’ for America** – Last week, American intelligence officials reportedly assessed that Russian President Vladimir Putin may use the Biden administration’s support for Ukraine as a pretext to order a new campaign to interfere in U.S. elections.

“We’re trying to feel our way, figuring out the first steps. What can we do in 2023, 2024?,” Russian “Americanist” Malek Dudakov, a political scientist specializing in the U.S., said. He suggested that Russia’s interference in the upcoming elections is still in its early stages, and that more will be accomplished after the war is over and frosty relations between the U.S. and Russia start to warm up. “When things thaw out and the presidential race for 2024 is firmly on the agenda, there’ll be moments we can use,” he added.

**Israel Deports 24 Ukrainians Without Appeal, Defying Court Order** - Israel has deported 24 Ukrainians within 48 hours of their arrival, despite a court ruling requiring them to be given that much time to appeal their deportations.

Tel Aviv District Court Judge Michal Agmon-Gonen, to whom this data was submitted, criticized the Population and Immigration Authority for its behavior on Monday. “The authority openly flouted the court’s decisions and denied [the refugees] the chance to change the decisions made in their cases by going to court,” she said.

**Russians traveling by train faced with posters** depicting war in Ukraine to combat Putin's misinformation - Russians taking the train from Moscow to the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad have to pass through Vilnius station in Lithuania. When their train pauses at the platform, they are greeted with 24 large posters depicting the war in Ukraine.

The posters show pictures of corpses, injured civilians, grieving families, destroyed homes and infrastructure, and child refugees. All posters have the same message: "Today, Putin is killing civilians in Ukraine. Do you support this?"



**China stockpiling to ensure domestic food security has global implications** - As China imports record levels of grain every year, an oft-repeated vow by President Xi Jinping is given greater impetus: "The Chinese people's rice bowl must be firmly held in their own hands."

But China's amassing of grain stockpiles has sparked allegations by some Western critics who say such a mentality has contributed to rising food prices globally amid the prolonged pandemic and now war between two of the world's biggest grain suppliers – Russia and Ukraine.

Many analysts point to China's grim history of hunger and poverty to explain the unprecedented emphasis Beijing has been placing on food security, and some say it is a prudent choice in the face of extreme weather, shipping disruptions, sanctions and conflicts that have globe-spanning implications.

**Changing Ukrainian history** – (see yesterday's article in this regard) Ukrainian military intelligence reported on March 24 that Russian occupying troops in the country were confiscating books and other materials that the Russian government has deemed "extremist" -- primarily books about Ukraine's Maidan revolution, the war against Russia-backed separatists in parts of eastern Ukraine, and studies of Ukraine's struggle for independence.

"The occupiers have a whole list of names that cannot be mentioned [in the titles of books]," the service wrote, listing such figures as 17th-century Cossack leader Ivan Mazepa, Ukrainian interwar independence leader Symon Petliura, far-right Ukrainian nationalist leader and Nazi collaborator Stepan Bandera, and others.

Perhaps like no war before, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has put history on the front line -- with Russian President Vladimir Putin personally lecturing the nation on how Ukraine was supposedly formed and why, in his opinion, it has no right to exist. In recent years, Russia has fiercely resisted efforts to shed light on Soviet-era repressions and to name the security agents who killed millions of Soviet citizens under dictator Josef Stalin and other Soviet leaders.

**Latvia Detains Belarusian National On Espionage Charge** - Latvian authorities say they detained a Belarusian citizen on an espionage charge in mid-February, saying that he allegedly collected information on Latvia's military facilities for Belarusian intelligence.

**Putin 'resettling Ukrainians 5,500 miles away in Siberia'**, report claims - Vladimir Putin has sent almost 100,000 Ukrainian refugees thousands of miles away from their home, to resettle in remote corners of Russia, including Siberia and the Arctic Circle, according to Kremlin documents.

Moscow made the emergency order last month to move 95,739 people of the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Donetsk, and Lugansk away from the war zones to be resettled as far as 5,500 miles away from their homes, the Kremlin decree seen by The i stated.

It comes amid several reports that Russian forces have allegedly forcibly disappeared, held captive or interrogated people in Ukrainian towns since Mr Putin's invasion of the country on 24 February.

The decree stated that "taking into account the current situation" in Ukraine, the Russian federation "approves the distribution" of citizens to the "constituent entities of the Russian Federation" and asked authorities to "ensure the reception" of 95,739 people.

## Containment

**Missile Defense: NATO Member Slovakia Sends Huge Military Fleet To Ukraine** - NATO member Slovakia has become the latest country to bolster the embattled military of neighboring Ukraine with a convoy that includes S300 missile systems to help fight against Russia's ongoing "special military operation."

Other NATO nations have also sent tanks, howitzers, anti-aircraft systems, and other hardware to Ukraine, with military expert Oleh Zhdano singling the UK out for providing the "most weapons."

**Pentagon Looks to Vastly Expand Weapons to Ukraine** - "The Biden administration is poised to dramatically expand the scope of weapons it's providing Ukraine, U.S. officials said Tuesday, with the Pentagon looking to send Mi-17 helicopters that can be equipped to attack Russian vehicles, armored Humvees and a range of other arms," the Washington Post reports.

"The new aid package could be worth \$750 million." Preliminary plans circulating among government officials and lawmakers in Washington also includes howitzer cannons, coastal defense drones and protective suits to safeguard personnel in the event of a chemical, biological or nuclear weapons attack, the officials said, though they cautioned that it was not immediately clear if all of those items would end up in the final package.

Ukraine's ambassador to the United States, met last week with officials from @GeneralAtomics, maker of Reaper and Predator drones. General Atomics says it has unmanned strike aircraft ready to go if the U.S. government approves.