

# Conflict Update # 369

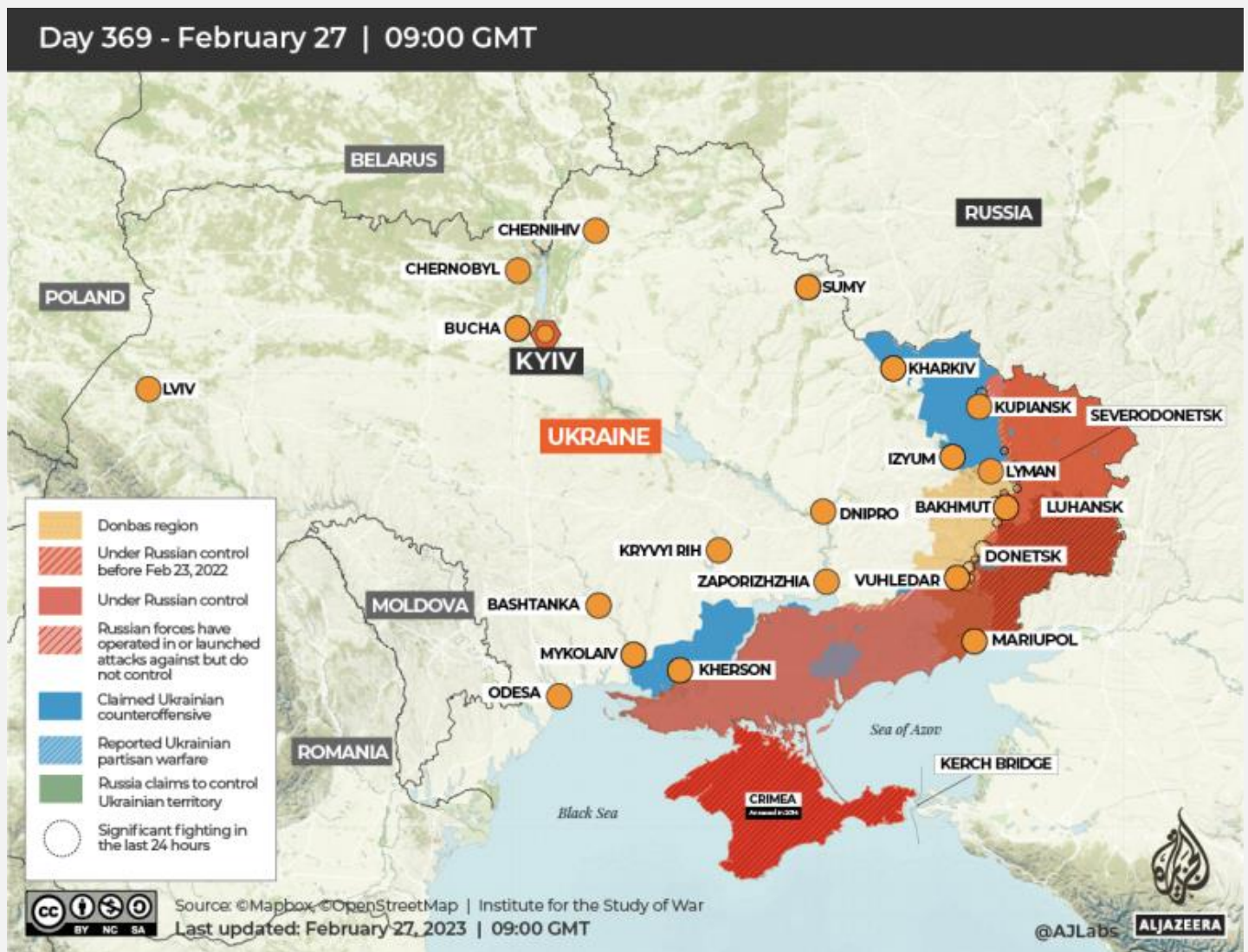
February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2023

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## Conflict Assessment

**Russian losses** – 148,690 (560) soldiers killed, 3,385 (+4) enemy tanks, 6,621 (+0) armored combat vehicles, 2,380 (+0) artillery systems, 475 (+0) MLRS systems, 244 (+0) air defense systems, 300 (+1) warplanes, 288 (+0) helicopters, 2,048 (+11) UAVs of the operational-tactical level, 873 (+0) cruise missiles, 18 (+0) warships/cutters, 5,248 (+6) trucks and tankers, 4 Iskander Missile Launchers (+0), 239 fuel bowsers (+0) and 230 (+0) units of equipment.

## Key Takeaways

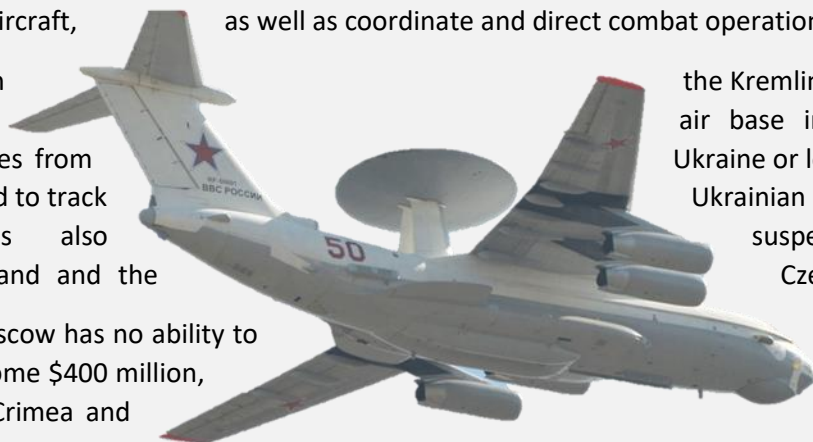


**Vital Russian AWACS plane destroyed** – Last night I was watching coverage on a blogger channel of a Russian AWACS aircraft that was destroyed.

Russia's A-50 aircraft is a surveillance and command-and-control aircraft that is designed to monitor enemy airspace and detect incoming aircraft, as well as coordinate and direct combat operations.

One of only three in the world, the A-50 was struck by either drones from aircraft was being used to track troops,' and was also supplies through Poland and the

It is reported that Moscow has no ability to replace this plane, which is estimated to cost some \$400 million, with the remaining two aircraft stationed in Crimea and Kazakhstan.



the Kremlin's AWACS fleet, it was based air base in Minsk, Belarus and was Ukraine or local partisans. This particular Ukrainian jet fighters and ground suspected of monitoring incoming Czech Republic.

**Update:** Local Belarussian partisans have claimed responsibility for the attack. The attack was reportedly carried out by two operatives who used drones and had already left the country.

**Ukraine's ministry of defence claimed in total to have shot down 11 of 14 drones** deployed overnight, including nine over Kyiv. Two emergency service workers were killed and three other people injured during a drone attack on Khmelnytskyi, according to the city's mayor.

**Ukraine can only defend skies if partners lift 'aviation taboo'** - Zelenskyy says Ukraine can only defend its skies if an "aviation taboo" is ended by its allies.

"Our pilots and anti-aircraft units and other experts of our air force are doing a great job," he said in a speech. "But we will be able to completely protect our skies when the aviation taboo is fully lifted in relations with our partners."

The president has been lobbying his allies to send fighter jets to Ukraine.

**Russian forces have escalated shelling and infantry assaults** in the Bilohorivka, Svatove-Kupiansk and Kreminna areas of Ukraine's eastern Luhansk province, according to the region's Ukrainian governor Serhiy Haidai. "Western offensive heavy equipment is on the way and therefore in any week the military command can conduct an operation following the same plan as they did in the Kharkiv region," Haidai said.

**Russia's Medvedev says Western arms supplies risk nuclear catastrophe** - Russia's former president and a Putin ally says continued arms supplies from the West to Ukraine risks a global nuclear catastrophe.

The latest comments by Dmitry Medvedev follow Putin's nuclear warning last week and remarks that the confrontation with the West is a battle for the survival of Russia and the Russian people.


"Of course, the pumping in of weapons can continue .... and prevent any possibility of reviving negotiations," Medvedev said in remarks published in the daily Izvestia.

"Our enemies are doing just that, not wanting to understand that their goals will certainly lead to a total fiasco. Loss for everyone. A collapse. Apocalypse where you forget for centuries about your former life until the rubble ceases to emit radiation."

**The UK's MoD stated "Russia will likely be concerned that unexplained explosions are occurring"** in and around Mariupol, a location "at least 80km away from the frontline ... [which] it had probably previously assessed as beyond the range of routine Ukrainian strike capabilities."

**Comment** – As reported over the past few days, these “explosions” are the result of Ukrainian longer-range missile attacks. Kyiv has destroyed a number of ammunition depots to the north of Mariupol.

**Joint NATO forces drill in Slovakia** – Added to yesterday’s Update, it is now being reported that NATO forces are conducting joint military exercises in Slovakia as well.

As can be seen from the map alongside, the organization is conducting a number of military exercises, marked as  around the Ukrainian periphery, some having been there for extended periods, with others starting this and last week.

Belarus is similarly being flanked with exercises close to and along its northwestern borders.

There are also exercises transpiring in Norway in a number of different areas and with different force commands.

As mentioned in yesterday’s Update, it looks as if NATO is both conducting these exercises along the Ukrainian border, as well as and in conjunction with locating reserve weaponry in strategic positions in and around Ukraine.

It appears that should Russia react in some unforeseen way, or should the Ukrainian situation worsen, NATO forces are within spitting distance of entering the fray in minimal time, fully equipped and trained.



**Update: Poland and Germany may hold joint manoeuvres, minister says** - Washington is in talks with Berlin and Warsaw to hold joint military manoeuvres in Poland in response to Russia's threat to the eastern border of the NATO alliance, German Defence Minister Boris Pistorius said Sunday.

Exercises were being "considered", Pistorius told public broadcaster ARD, without confirming or adding any details "for now".

Military manoeuvres in a country bordering Ukraine, invaded one year ago by Russia, would send a "very clear" signal to NATO allies "but also to (Russian President Vladimir) Putin," he added.

NATO "is far from being as weak as (Putin) has believed for a long time," said Pistorius.

**Note** – These intended maneuvers are not include in the map above.

**Ukraine celebrates as downing of Russian jets hits new milestone** - Ukraine's government praised its air defenders as Kyiv's military said that 300 Russian jets have been shot down over the country since the outbreak of full-scale war.

"Every Russian military jet invading our air space or attacking our people is a legitimate target for our air defense troops," Ukraine's defense ministry said on Twitter on Monday.

Ukraine's 110th Mechanized Brigade shot down a Russian Su-25 warplane on February 26, the Kyiv Independent reported on Monday.

"Hope you had a nice landing," the ministry added in a graphic attached to the post.

**Comment** – This 300 number excludes the A-50 AWACS plane destroyed in Belarus late yesterday. 288 Helicopters have also been downed by Ukrainian forces using manpad munitions.



**Update:** Report in social media - A Russian jet has crashed in the Belgorod region of Western Russia mere miles from the Ukrainian border, regional governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said.

'A plane of the Ministry of Defence crashed in the Valuysky urban district. Now an investigation team and officials of the Ministry of Emergency Situations are working on the spot,' he wrote on Telegram early this morning.

The pilot, who had just returned from a combat sortie over Ukrainian skies, ejected from the Sukhoi Su-25 jet but Russia's MoD later said the pilot did not survive.

It was not immediately clear whether the jet had been hit by a strike from Ukraine, but Russia's MoD claimed the crash was due to a 'technical malfunction', a routine explanation when its warplanes are downed.

'After completing a combat mission, a Su-25 aircraft of the Russian Aerospace Forces crashed while returning to its base airfield in the Belgorod Region. The pilot died... According to preliminary data, the cause of the disaster was a technical malfunction,' the ministry said.

**Two Russian partisans sentenced to prison** - A Russian court sentenced two defendants to three-and-a-half years in a strict regime colony for plotting to sabotage a railway in the Belgorod region that was carrying military equipment and troops to the frontlines.



Belgorod's proximity to the Ukrainian border means the region is home to several ammunition depots and field camps from which Russian soldiers can deploy to Ukraine.

As a result, it is often the target of Ukrainian artillery and missiles which seek to destroy Russian military equipment and sever supply lines.

**Status of Bakhmut remains unclear as Kyiv counters Russian claims** - Victory over the battle for Bakhmut remains unclear as Ukraine continues to counter Russian claims of taking more territory in the area.

The town in the Donetsk region has become a symbol of Russia's war of attrition, as its ongoing offensive has been met with fierce Ukrainian resistance.

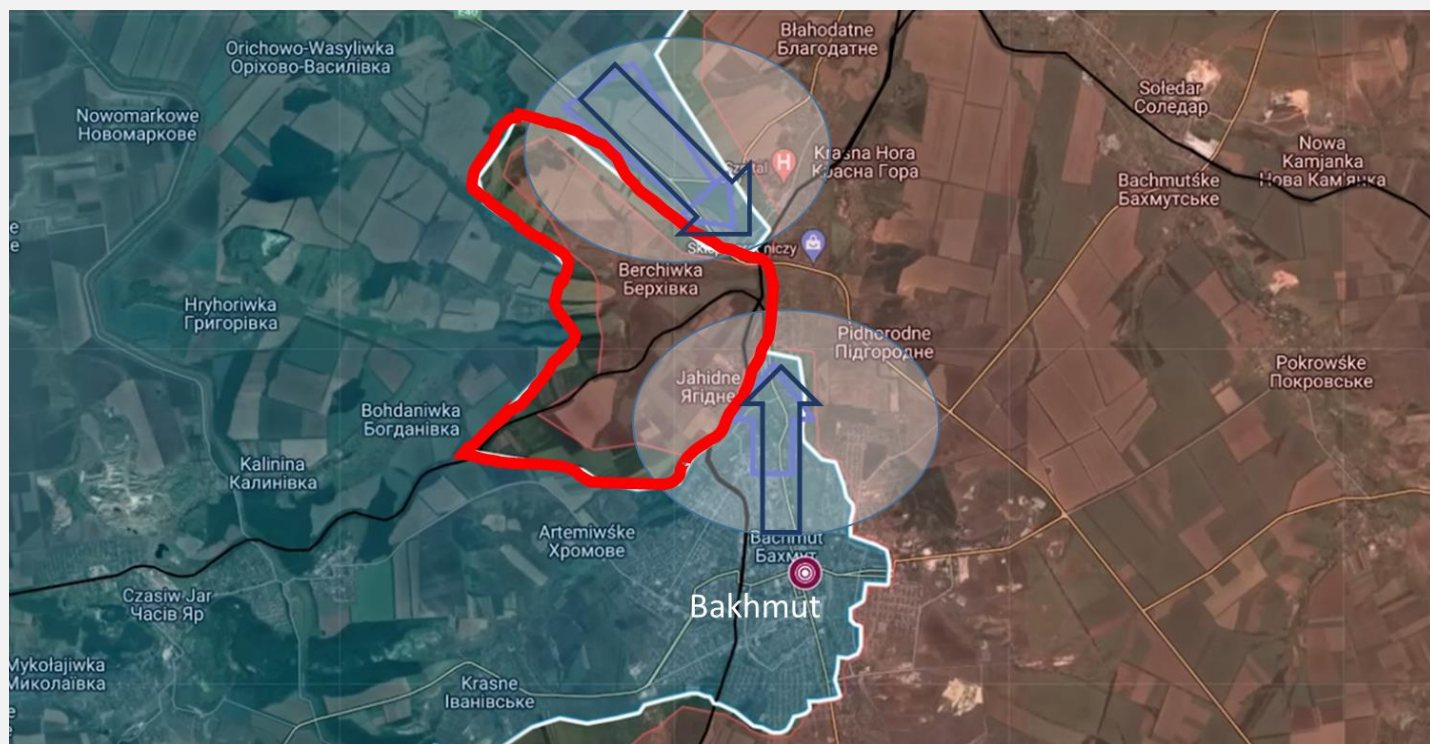
Although Moscow has captured much of the neighboring Luhansk region, that together with Donetsk forms the Donbas, the Donetsk region remains split between Ukrainian and Russian control. Other nearby towns have also seen similar standoffs, like Vuhledar and Marinka.

**Comment** – Last night's geofootage showed Russian troops making minor inroads to the north of Bakhmut, whilst Ukrainian troops were making larger inroads to the south. But the city was still in defending hands. Ukraine also blew the larger of two dams located to the north of the city, flooding Russian positions. Aside from drowning advancing troops, it also creates severe muddy conditions – almost impossible for soldiers to advance in.

**Update:** Incoming reports, as of a few hours ago, show Ukrainian troops counter-attacking and pushing Russian units back in areas to the north of Bakhmut. Looking at the map below as published hours ago, Ukrainian forces are close to linking up where the arrows meet, isolating Russian troops in the red area.

Tomorrow's reports should update this situation more accurately.

This will not be the first battle where Russians are lured into "killing zones," although I do not believe that to be the case here, having watched incremental gains by the latter over the past week.



**NATO taking part in Ukraine conflict with arms supplies, says Putin** - Putin yesterday accused NATO members of taking part in the Ukraine conflict by donating arms to the country and said the West planned to break up Russia. **Comment** – More than likely geared to his Russian audience.

## Comments, Updates, Developments and Reports

**Zelenskyy meets Saudi Arabian officials** - Meanwhile, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy welcomed Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud to Kyiv. It was the first-ever official visit to Ukraine by a Saudi official.

Minister Al Saud brought with him a pledge of €379.5 million in humanitarian aid.

**Comment** – This is interesting, coming as it is contrary to Saudi relations with Russia, both in potentially receiving an invitation to join BRICS, as well as in OPEC+ actions and discussions.

**China has 'very clearly' taken Russia's side in Ukraine war: US** - China has been "anything but an honest broker" in efforts to bring peace to Ukraine and "very clearly" has taken Russia's side, US Department of State spokesman Ned Price says.

China has provided Russia with "diplomatic support, political support, with economic support, with rhetorical support," Price said at a news briefing.

**Turkey's foreign minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu said on Monday that talks with Sweden and Finland** regarding their Nato membership bids would resume on 9 March, after a delay in January in the wake of a Qur'an-burning protest. The meeting will take place in Brussels and will include discussion on the implementation of the memorandum signed between the countries. It later emerged that the Qur'an-burning incident in Stockholm was funded by a far-right journalist with links to Kremlin-backed media.

**Russia is paying "a great deal of attention" to China's peace plan** to end Moscow's invasion of Ukraine and its details will need to be analyzed in detail, the Kremlin has said. Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said any initiatives that might bring peace closer were worthy of attention, but that Russia was continuing to prosecute its so-called "special military operation" in Ukraine and that, for now, he didn't see any signs suggesting a peaceful resolution could be achieved.

**Comment** – As detailed in yesterday's Update, it is indeed strange that China suddenly tables a "peace proposal" favorable to its ally Russia. Stranger still is the timing of the proposal, right when Russia knows and understands that Ukraine is gearing for an offensive as covered in Update #368.

**Algeria to reopen Kyiv embassy - Moscow ally Algeria** is set to reopen its embassy in Kyiv, which has been closed since Russia's invasion of Ukraine more than a year ago, the foreign ministry said on Sunday.

"This decision comes within the framework of safeguarding the interests of the Algerian state," a ministry statement said, adding that the embassy would reopen soon without providing details.

A chargé d'affaires will run the mission when it reopens, it added.

Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune had announced the planned reopening during a television broadcast on Friday, acknowledging Algeria's long-standing relations with Russia.

**On Ukraine's eastern front, civilians cling to survival as troops repel Russian invaders** - On the largely static front line between Ukrainian and Russian forces that stretches over hundreds of kilometers (miles), from the

Black Sea in the south to Ukraine's northeastern border with Russia, Vuhledar has become one of the deadliest hot spots.

It has joined Bakhmut, Marinka and other cities and towns, particularly in fiercely contested eastern Ukraine, as evidence of a grinding and destructive war of attrition, as well as symbols of fierce Ukrainian resistance.

By defending their ruins, Ukrainian forces are slowing costly Russian offensive efforts to extend Moscow's control over the entirety of eastern Ukraine's industrial Donbas region. It became Russian President Vladimir Putin's revised target for conquest after his forces were beaten back from the capital, Kyiv, and northern Ukraine in the invasion's opening stage a year ago.

In Bakhmut, a soldier who allowed himself to be identified only by his war name, "Expert," said the pulverized city in the Donbas' Donetsk region "has become a stronghold" for Ukraine.

"See what they have done to it?" he said of Russian forces that have been pounding Bakhmut for months, slowly inching forward with heavy casualties to capture a prize that, if it falls, might allow Moscow to argue that the invasion is making progress.

**Zelenskyy fires top military commander** - Ukraine's commander of joint forces operation has been dismissed from his post, President Zelenskyy announced. Major Gen. Eduard Mykhailovich Moskalov had been appointed to the position last March when Lt. Gen. Oleksandr Pavliuk was appointed head of the Kyiv regional military administration.

## Sanctions

**EU extends sanctions on Belarus over Ukraine for one year** - The EU says it has extended sanctions on Belarus by one year over Minsk's continued repression of the opposition and its support for Russia's war on Ukraine.

The bloc has hit Belarus with multiple waves of sanctions since strongman Alexander Lukashenko launched a campaign of repression against demonstrators protesting a disputed election in 2020.

Lukashenko, who has been in power for nearly three decades, is a key Putin ally.

## Containment

**US sending Ukraine another \$1.2bn: Yellen** - The United States is transferring an additional \$1.2bn to Ukraine as it fights to resist Russia's invasion, according to Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen.

On a trip to Kyiv following US President Joe Biden's surprise visit last week, Yellen met with Ukrainian President Zelenskyy and announced the transfer of "an additional amount of over \$1.2bn" to his government.

This would be the first tranche of about \$10bn the US will provide in the coming months, she said in a speech.

"Our economic support is helping keep the Ukrainian government and critical service providers operational under extraordinary circumstances," including by paying civil servants, firefighters and teachers, she said.

**Comment** – Add this to the list in yesterday's Update and something is clearly going on.

**Message for you Belarussian comrades** – It is being reported that Ukrainian bloggers are broadcasting into Belarus that their Russian tanks are dangerous and should be viewed as "death traps."

Pictures of destroyed tanks and armored vehicles are being relayed into Belarussian homes and networks, depicting how vulnerable Russian Soviet-era tanks are, together with the kill ratio of tank operators.

**Comment** – This is sure to unsettle those folk north of the border seeking to claim glory in Belarussian army offensives.

## Putin & Russia

**Putin has claimed Russia had no choice but to take into account the nuclear capabilities of Nato** as the US-led military alliance was seeking the defeat of Russia. “In today’s conditions, when all the leading Nato countries have declared their main goal as inflicting a strategic defeat on us, so that our people suffer as they say, how can we ignore their nuclear capabilities in these conditions?” Putin told Rossiya 1 state television, according to Tass. “They tried to reshape the world exclusively on their terms. We had no choice but to react,” he said, adding that the west was complicit in Ukraine’s “crimes.”

**Russian transfer of Ukrainian children is a ‘genocidal crime’: Ukraine** - Russia’s alleged forced transfer of thousands of children from Ukraine is “probably the largest forced deportation in modern history”, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba says on the sidelines of the UN Human Rights Council session in Geneva.

“The most chilling crime is that Russia steals Ukrainian children,” Kuleba said in a video message to a packed room on the opening day of the five-week session, which will take up Russia’s alleged war crimes in Ukraine.

“This is a genocidal crime,” Kuleba charged.

**Putin has accused the west of seeking to “dismember” Russia** and to turn the vast country into a series of weak mini-states. In an interview with the state TV channel Rossiya on Sunday, the Russian president claimed the US and its Nato allies wanted to “inflict a strategic defeat on us”. The aim, he said, was to “make our people suffer.” (**Comment** – this is surely aimed at the Russian people).

**Will Russia declare another round of mobilization?** - Another round of mobilization in Russia is likely this year. The prospect of a second round of the draft has hung over Russian society since the first one in September 2022, and both Ukraine and Western officials cited in the press in the past couple of months have publicly said Russia is moving towards such a decision.

Behind this decision is a dilemma that reaches to the very heart of Russia’s invasion plan. This is continued tension between Russia’s military capabilities, Putin’s ambitious strategic objectives for the war, and the Kremlin’s unwillingness to scale down these objectives. This leaves it with little option but to pursue any measure that can potentially help Russia’s military succeed. While mobilization is no silver bullet to all of Russia’s military failings, it would nonetheless provide Moscow with another boost in troop numbers, make it more difficult for Ukraine to advance, and set the scene for a protracted, attritional war.

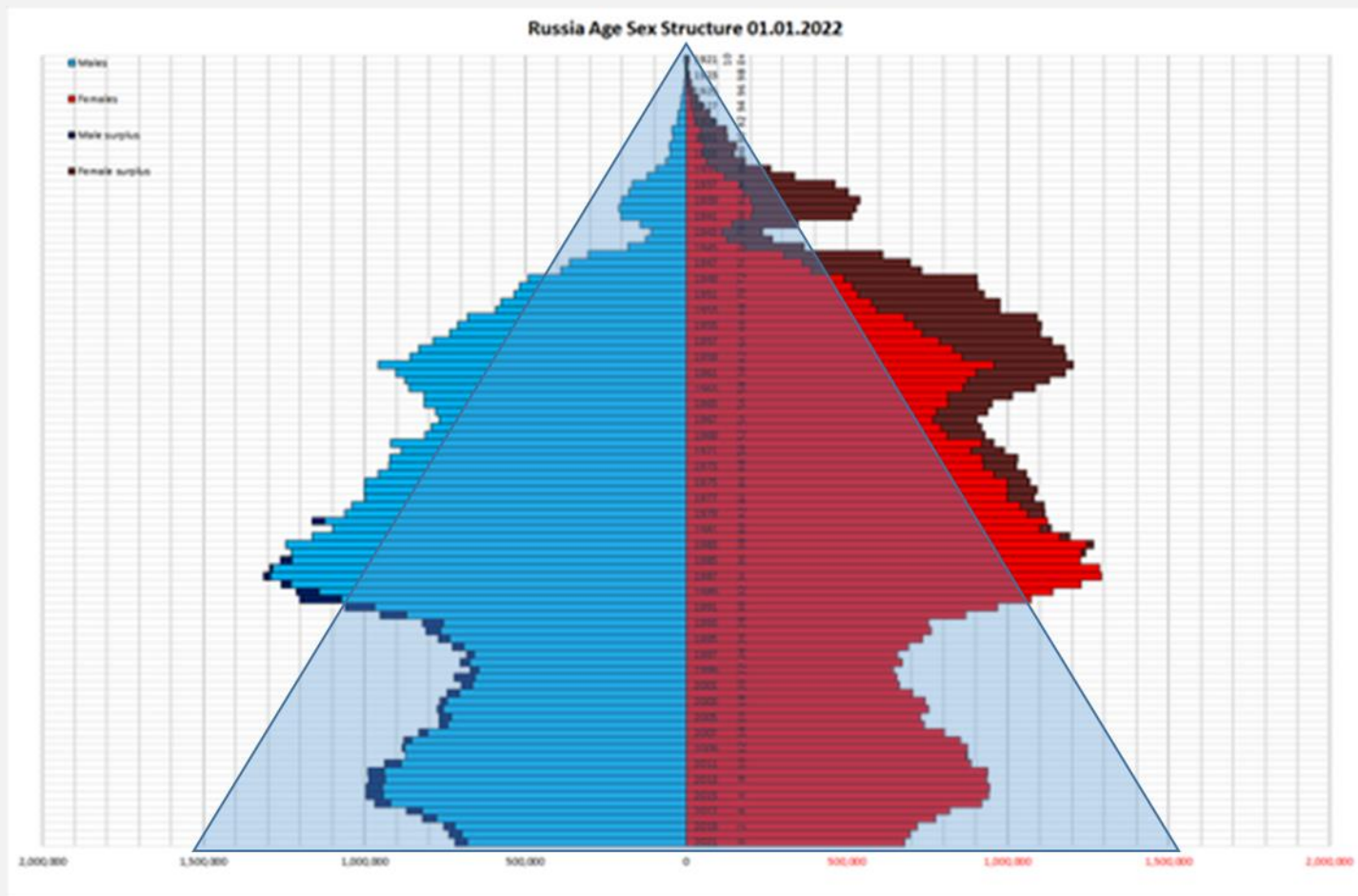
In September, Russia claimed it recruited 300,000 new troops as part of a ‘partial’ mobilization. However, the mobilization process appeared chaotic in practice and the number of recruits much less clear. Some students faced the draft, despite explicit pledges to the contrary. There were also protests across cities in Russia, though the police and authorities quickly quashed most of them.

The main reason that another round of mobilization is likely is that Russia still seems to hold ambitious strategic goals in Ukraine. At the very least, this appears to be the mass occupation of Ukraine’s territory. At most, the Kremlin probably still harbors aspirations of forcing regime change in Kyiv, though the means by which they could do that now are unclear.

**Comment** – Mobilizing is one thing, training and equipping battalions another altogether. The “hidden Russian elephant in the room” though is the drastic effect this, the previous mobilization and Putin’s invasion is having on Russia’s future prospects. Every country relies on the “multiplier” in order to grow – roughly every dollar invested in the economy



contributes another 3 to 4 dollars in return – and, coupled with inflation, among other elements, see's GDP rise and create a successful national economy and future. Good for getting re-elected, but of course Russia doesn't elect based on this fundamental principle of local politics, just going ahead and declaring victory for the candidate of their choice.



A country needs a positive pyramid-type demographic profile in order to meet the future. Russia is in danger of inverting its profile.

Going forward the demographic, already disastrous for them in that its fertility rate is way below parity, is now losing evermore younger folk to Putin's war effort.

Reviewing Russia's current profile – shown above and as sourced from the World Bank - with an enhanced "ideal" demographic profile (triangle) superimposed on top, one can see there are way too many maturing citizens above 40 years of age – a disaster for its future economy.

The generally accepted fertility rate for positive future growth is c2.2, whereas Russia is sitting around 1.4.

They also have the highest global rate of alcoholism and death due to alcohol-related causes.

From 1992 to 2012, and again since 2016, Russia's death rate exceeded its birth rate, a demographic crisis with an ageing population with a median age of 40.3 years as of January last year.

Those folk over 40 years in age should, in profile general, be further down the scale, ratio-wise, than where they are.

As mentioned in a previous Update, the top sector - older folk - tends to invest in an economy, the middle sector drives an economy, buying goods and services, building homes and raising families, whilst the bottom sector is the future basis upon which a country grows.

Looking at Moscow's profile it is obvious a huge demographic implosion is happening and even more damaging ahead. It is nigh on impossible for a country to reverse this extreme a profile.

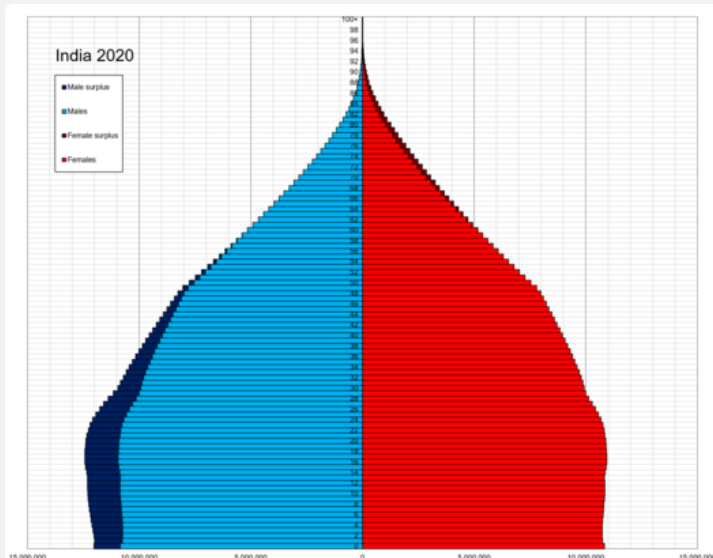
Russia's illegal invasion of its neighbor is exacerbating this already chaotic demographic future by killing off and/or permanently injuring hundreds of thousands in the middle sector, and even more concerning is that by losing these folk, they are not multiplying by fathering children and raising families. They cannot – they are dead or injured.

Now one can start understanding why the Kremlin has specialized "kiddie squads" who follow their armies into occupied areas and seize kids and younger Ukrainians, deporting them back to Russia, where they are "adopted" by Russian families (See preceding article).

Aside from the genocidal practice this constitutes, there are two elements in my opinion as to why they are doing this, the first as elaborated on above, and the second in order to bolster a racial profile with a higher percentage of "Russians" of Slav descent, which is what the majority of Ukrainians are.

A large number of Russian oblasts, provinces and "states" have Slav populations as minorities, which Moscow desperately wants to modify.

By way of comparison, look at the **Indian** demographic profile, pictured to the right as of 2020. Completely different and far more depictive of a proper outline.



**China** - China's profile is in an even worse situation, given its years-long "One-Child" policy. Peter Zeihan, the renowned strategist, estimates that China's population will halve within 30 years.

It is further believed that, given these astounding facts, coupled with China overcounting its population in its last census by some 120 million, all of whom are thought to be under 35 years of age and mostly women of child-bearing age, India is bound to be the "Next China."

**Wagner mercenary chief calls for Russian defence minister's son-in-law to be raped or 'given the sledgehammer' as extraordinary rift between Putin's top military cronies spirals out of control –**

Prigozhin, boss of the feared Russian Wagner mercenary group has called for the Russian defence minister's son-in-law to be raped or 'given the sledgehammer'.

The Wagner chief threatened to have his men bring defence minister Sergei Shoigu's son-in-law Alexey Stolyarov, 33, to him so he could be trained to go and fight in Ukraine.

Prigozhin said the fitness influencer could be 'raped' or face the notorious 'sledgehammer' execution that Wagner has used to kill defectors, as the bitter rift between Putin's top military cronies spirals out of control.

The Wagner chief, like General Shoigu, pictured right, is a close Putin crony, but the two men loathe each other.

Prigozhin demanded that Stolyarov - who avoided the military draft and is the partner of Shoigu's 32-year-old daughter Ksenia Shoigu - should be trained for war.



As John Fogerty, another good friend of mine, wisely laid out in *"Fortunate Son"* so many years ago.

**Comment** – A very unfortunate turn of phrase by a senior commander, but then who knows, and who is surprised?, given their propensity for shelling innocent women and children on a daily basis. It remains to be seen how Putin reacts to this provocative statement by one of his close henchmen.