

# Conflict Update # 36

April 21<sup>st</sup>, 2022

## Conflict Assessment

**Putin claims “victory” in Mariupol** - Putin claimed victory in the biggest battle of the Ukraine war, declaring the port of Mariupol "liberated" after nearly two months of siege, despite hundreds of defenders still holding out inside a giant steel works. In a televised meeting with his defense minister inside the Kremlin, Putin said there was no need for a final confrontation with the last defenders who were boxed in after surviving nearly two months of Russia's siege.

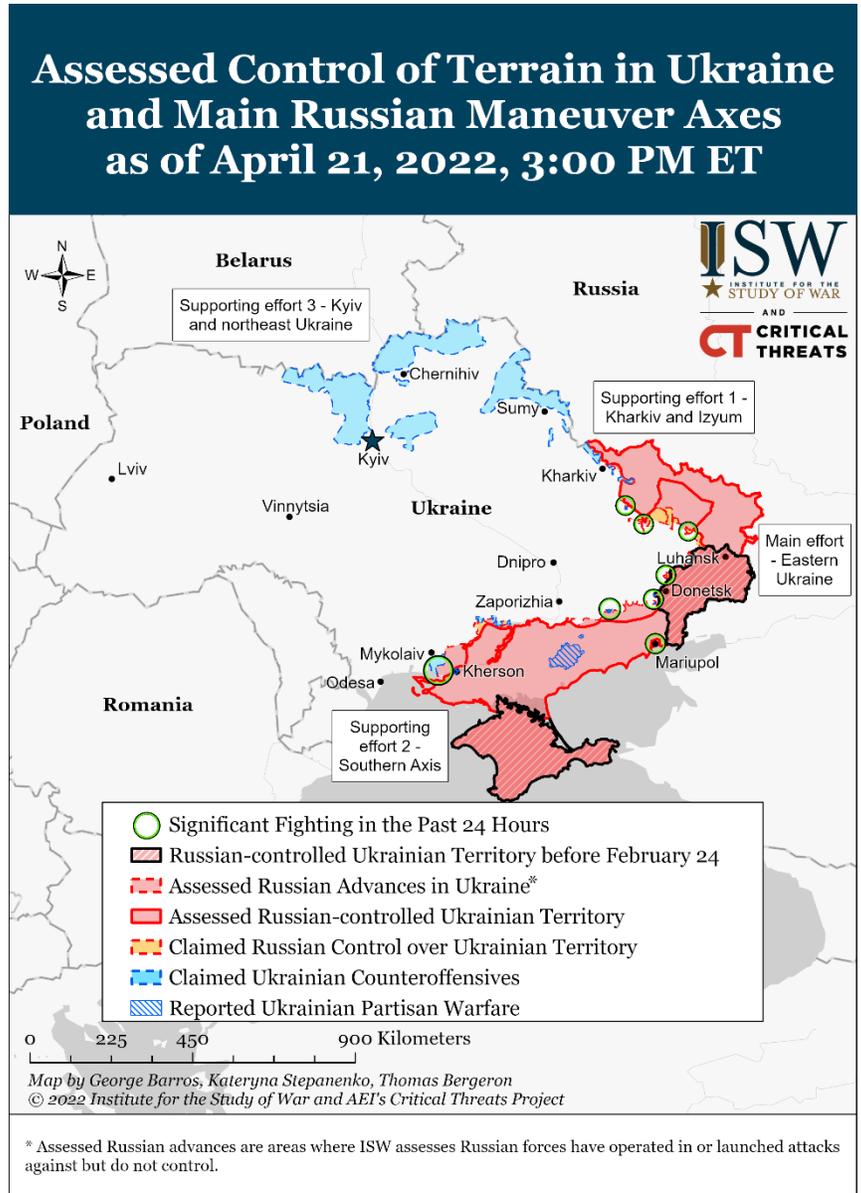
**Putin Calls Off Plans To Storm Mariupol Steel Plant, Orders Siege Instead** - Putin has ordered Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu to cancel plans to storm the Azovstal steel plant in the besieged Ukrainian port city of Mariupol and instead blockade it in order to protect the lives of Russian soldiers.

**Subordinate Main Effort—Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts** (Russian objective: Capture the entirety of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts, the claimed territory of Russia’s proxies in Donbas) - Russian forces continued offensive operations in eastern Ukraine but **made only marginal gains on April 21**.

**Supporting Effort #1—Kharkiv and Izyum:** (Russian objective: Advance southeast to support Russian operations in Luhansk Oblast; defend ground lines of communication (GLOCs) to the Izyum axis) - Russian forces continued assaults on Ukrainian positions around Izyum but **did not secure any territorial gains in the past 24 hours**.

**Supporting Effort #2—Southern Axis:** (Objective: Defend Kherson against Ukrainian counterattacks) - Russian forces likely conducted local attacks on Ukrainian positions west of Kherson on April 21 but **did not secure any new territory**.

**Supporting Effort #3—Sumy and Northeastern Ukraine:** (Russian objective: Withdraw combat power in good order for redeployment to eastern Ukraine) - There was **no significant change in this area in the past 24 hours**.



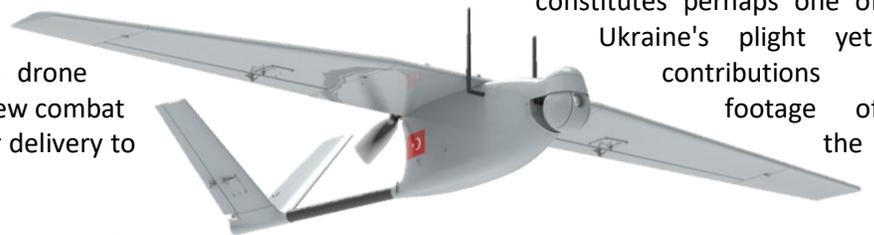
**T-72: The Russian Tank Getting Blown To Bits In Ukraine** - T-72 – Russia’s Most Prolific Main Battle Tank is an Antiquated War Machine – According to Ukrainian sources, as well as western observers, Russia has lost a significant number of T-72 tanks to enemy fire since it began its unprovoked and unwarranted invasion of Ukraine. However, Russia likely has plenty to spare. Since it entered production in 1971 – to replace the T-55/55 series – the T-72 has served as the workhorse of the Soviet and later Russian tank forces.

The 1982 war in Lebanon should have served as an ominous portent that the antiquated tanks were no match for modern anti-tank weapons. Even forty years ago, the Syrian T-72s proved no match for Israeli Merkava main battle tanks (MBTs) and were knocked out in droves. Iraq’s T-72s didn’t fare much better a decade later when the “Lions of Babylon “ – as the locally made T-72s were called – were also destroyed in large numbers during the 1991 Gulf War.

In 2003, U.S. M1 Abrams tanks again engaged their T-72 counterparts and took out huge numbers, while suffering few casualties.

At just 41 tons, the T-72 was also extremely lightweight and compact compared to Western MBTs of the late Cold War era. It was designed to traverse bridges in Eastern and Central Europe that would be denied to other MBTs. Yet, it retained the characteristic low silhouette of the early Soviet MBTs, while reactive armor was fitted to variants produced after 1988.

**New Bayraktar UAVs Spotted In Ukraine** - Delivery of at least 16 additional Bayraktar TB2 UCAVs, on top of the 18 already in Ukraine's pre-war inventory, the most significant instances of support to Now evidence has emerged that Turkey's drone have not remained limited to the TB2, with new combat Baykar's Mini-Bayraktar UAV confirming their delivery to country.



constitutes perhaps one of Ukraine's plight yet. contributions footage of the

The big advantage of UAVs like the Mini-Bayraktar is that they can easily carried and deployed by ordinary soldiers in the field, requiring no runway either for launch or recovery. They can then be utilised for spotting targets to be engaged either by ATGMs and other light equipment or more typically artillery units. In such operations small UAVs (including the more rudimentary off-the-shelf quadcopter types) have already contributed to stunning losses to Russian forces around Kiev, which were essentially sitting ducks for Ukrainian artillery so long as they could be accurately spotted.

**Putin’s Got A Problem: He Might Lose The War For Donbas** - The latest intelligence update from the United Kingdom’s Ministry of Defence argues that the Russian military is struggling to make progress in the Donbas region of Ukraine, even as troops intensify shelling in the area.

“Russian shelling and strikes on the Donbas line of control continue to increase, with the Ukrainians repelling numerous attempted advances by Russian forces,” the April 19 update reads.

The British government department added that Russia efforts to move through the region “continues to be impacted by the environmental, logistical and technical challenges” that have affected their armed forces throughout the offensive. British defense officials added that the Russians are also struggling to hold back the “highly-motivated Ukrainian armed forces.”

The British agency also said that Russia’s inability to completely take control over the southern port city of Mariupol, which has been “wiped off the face of the Earth” in recent weeks, indicates that Russia is failing to achieve its goals as quickly as originally intended.

The early signals are that, just as they failed in the north, the Russians are going to have great difficulties organizing the campaign that is needed to expand significantly beyond their proxy areas in the Donbas.

So do they stick with they seized since 2014, Crimea in south and parts of Donbas? But....

Vladimir Putin could have gotten a better deal 56 days ago at the start of the invasion. Because Ukraine has been able to resist and hold out, it will set out much tougher terms now.

**Another Russian colonel dies in war with Ukraine** as Vladimir Putin's armed forces continue to sustain losses - Col. Mikhail Nagamov, 41, commander of a sapper regiment of the Western Military District, died in Ukraine on April 13, it was revealed on Wednesday. His death was reported by the administration of the village of Suslonger, in the Russian Republic of Mari El, his home.

**Ethiopians Queue up to Volunteer for Russia's Fight in Ukraine** - The queues formed early each morning outside the Russian embassy in Ethiopia's capital Addis Ababa. Drawn by rumours on social media, young men and old, many with their military records in hand, arrived with hopes of fighting for Russia in Ukraine.

**Double cross a Russian bridge?** - A Ukrainian official raised the possibility of a Ukrainian airstrike against the strategically important bridge linking Crimea to the Russian mainland. His statement on Thursday prompted angry denouncements from top Russian political figures.

Oleksiy Danilov, the secretary of Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council, was asked in an interview with Ukraine's Radio NV whether Kyiv would be able to hit the \$4 billion Kerch bridge, which is Moscow's only direct road link to the peninsula, in order to stem the flow of military resupplies channeled through it.

## Nuclear Tactic

**ICBM test** - In a show of strength two months into its assault on Ukraine, Russia test-launched a new nuclear-capable intercontinental ballistic missile which Putin said would make Moscow's enemies stop and think.

**Russia is against use of nuclear bombs in Ukraine, Lavrov claims** - Russia is committed to avoiding nuclear war, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said, after he was quizzed about the possible use of atomic weapons in Ukraine.

Russia – and Lavrov – firmly stated in the leadup to the Ukrainian invasion, that there would be no invasion. They also stated this and signed commitments after invading Crimea in 2014. Why should their word now be believed? – or is the mere mention of this an ominous sign?

## Peace Talks

**Chechen warlord Ramzan Kadyrov told Putin he'd help assassinate Zelenskyy** - Chechen warlord Ramzan Kadyrov said he'd provide help with assassination attempts on Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy during a meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin, a top Ukrainian official said Thursday.

The Ukrainian Secretary of the National Security and Defense, Oleksiy Danilov, told Radio NV that Kadyrov and Putin discussed plans to send a group of Chechen assassins to kill Zelenskyy in a meeting on February 3.

Danilov said that three groups working for Kadyrov were deployed to Ukraine to carry out the plan two days after the start of the invasion.

They did not go earlier because they had been waiting for a "green corridor" to safely get to the government headquarters in Kyiv, he added. But the assassins were not successful on their mission. "We followed all three groups. One of them was destroyed by our military. Two of them left our country after that," Danilov said.

**Will Russia's Huge Donbas Offensive Kill Peace Talks?** Ukraine said it was hard to predict when peace talks might resume because of the Mariupol siege and the new military offensive.

**Ukraine-Russia peace talks are likely to fail because negotiating with Putin is like dealing with a 'crocodile,' Boris Johnson says** - UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson said it's unlikely that Ukraine and Russia can make peace through negotiations, comparing talks with Russian leader Vladimir Putin to dealing with a "crocodile."

"I really don't see how the Ukrainians can easily sit down and come to some kind of accommodation. How can you negotiate with a crocodile when it's got your leg in its jaws?" Johnson said Wednesday on a flight to India, The Guardian reported.

"I think it's very hard to see how the Ukrainians can negotiate with Putin now, given his manifest lack of good faith and his strategy, which is evident, which is to try to engulf and capture as much of Ukraine as he can and then perhaps to have some kind of negotiation from a position of strength or even to launch another assault on Kyiv," the prime minister said.

**Putin's price for 'peace'? Claiming victory, regardless of the truth** - As Russia builds up its offensive operations in the east of Ukraine, many in the west have suggested that Vladimir Putin has ordered his forces to deliver success in Mariupol in time for Russia's Victory Day, on 9 May. That's an assessment based largely on circumstantial evidence and the cult status of Victory Day itself – but it's not one that's supported by what Russia is telling its own population, where domestic propaganda channels are no longer making promises of a swift end to the conflict.

Nevertheless, Putin is free to declare victory by whatever artificial deadline he chooses. Russia has already reinvented what its war was supposed to achieve and can do so again if necessary. Moscow can say it has achieved its aims regardless of the facts on the ground and call an end to its "special operation" at will. This would present Ukraine with another harsh dilemma – the need to fight on while Russia appears to be offering peace, risking the erosion of support from western backers who would prefer an end to the fighting even if, in the long term, it could mean the end of Ukraine.

Rather than aiming at steamrolling the Ukrainian defences regardless of cost, Russia's offensive could have far more limited and deliberate ambitions. The eventual, inevitable end of Ukrainian resistance in Mariupol can be presented as a major strategic victory. And with Russia and its propagandists continuing to depict the Azov battalion based there as a neo-Nazi organization, this also means Russia can claim a major success in its aim of "de-Nazification" of Ukraine. Russia enjoys almost total control of the information that reaches large sectors of its population, so even insignificant territorial gains can be sold as major breakthroughs.

## Leaking in Russia

One thing that continues to strike me is the ongoing information coming in from Russia itself and from senior ranks of the administration. It is apparent that not only are these leaks continuing which appears to indicate dissatisfaction at ground level within Russia, but also the ability of Ukrainian technological intrusion into Russian "space."

We keep hearing and reading reports that, if you are Russian, should be not only secret but restricted. But they keep coming through.

Electronic eavesdropping continues unabatedly, with messages from Russian systems, private cell phones and government departments being released into the public domain.

It appears that all is not well in the Russian republic.

Putin is stepping along a very fine line with his calling the invasion a “Special military operation,” recruiting from afar, being secretive about casualties, particularly from the Moscow region and being unable to fill the ranks of his “much-vaunted” army.

Could there perhaps be an unraveling underway? This may be dangerous as, if cornered with no off ramp available, Putin may resort to unconventional channels of resolution.

## Post-Conflict

**“Indivisible security”** Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed a “global security initiative” that upholds the principle of “indivisible security”, although he gave no details of how it would be implemented. In talks over Ukraine, Russia has insisted that Western governments respect a 1999 agreement based on the principle of “indivisible security” that no country can strengthen its own security at the expense of others.

**Biden funding announcement April 21<sup>st</sup>** – during his announcement of further funding for Ukraine, Biden vowed that Russian President Vladimir Putin “will never succeed” in occupying Ukraine and stressed the need for continued unity among Western allies.

“Our unity at home with our allies and partners, and our unity with the Ukrainian people, is sending an unmistakable message to Putin -- he will never succeed in dominating and occupying **all of Ukraine**. That will not happen,” Biden said.

I read the term “all of Ukraine” with interest – does this mean that he is against Russia occupying “all of Ukraine,” indicating that there is a possibility that “some of Ukraine” may be occupied?

Should Russia secure the Donbas, declare “victory” for what it is worth and announce as such during the annual May Day Parade in Moscow, and then sue for peace, it will take a full frontal assault for Ukraine and NATO to recover this area from them. It is doubtful whether this will happen, unless Putin decides to advance further west in the future.

Ukraine is close to joining the EU, is there a possibility that it will also apply for membership of NATO?

## Putin’s “Special Military Operation”

**“War” Versus “Special Military Operation”** - On March 4, a law on “discrediting the armed forces,” which enacts severe punishments of up to 15 years in prison, was hastily adopted by the State Duma. The authorities have yet to execute these most draconian measures, although the total number of people detained for anti-war actions has already exceeded 15,000 (Ovdinfo.org, accessed April 19). Arguably, martial law has already been introduced in Russia, even though it has not been officially announced.

By invading Ukraine without cause, the Russian authorities have grossly violated the Criminal Code of their own state: Article 353, which forbids individuals from “Planning, preparing, initiating or waging an aggressive **war**.” However, the authorities profess a simple logic—only aggression against Russia itself can be called a “war.” When Russia attacks someone else, the euphemism “special military operation” is required. Such an approach is reminiscent of how the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 was officially declared “the fulfillment of international duty.”

Now we can understand why Putin calls it a “Special military operation” – because engaging in a “War” is illegal. But this presents him with an added challenge in that he cannot change military recruiting rules when he is engaged in a

“Special military operation,” he can only do this if Russia is at “War.” Thus, he is struggling with his recruitment drive because he has to conclude separate contracts with each and every recruit – with language specifically barring these recruits from being sent into a “hot zone” or a “War” – because there is no “War.”

Thus, he has had to engage mercenaries from afar in order to make up the numbers in his battalion groups. This in and of itself is problematic because they have different training regimes, weapons and loyalties. Caucasus soldiers from these bordering states are already starting to abandon his cause and invasion, particularly when bodies return to their homelands and families.

Lawyer Viktor Vorobyov, a member of the regional legislature of the Republic of Komi, who spoke out against the war when it began, was detained for 15 days, in violation of all laws on parliamentary immunity (Region.expert, March 1; Bnkomi.ru, March 7). The termination of the war and the withdrawal of troops from Ukraine was also demanded by the Federative Party, an unregistered political faction created in 2020 by public figures from ten Russian regions (Federativ.ru, March 1). The Buryat Democratic Movement, which is banned in Russia, appealed to soldiers originally from the Buryat Republic to refuse to carry out the criminal orders of their commanders (Region.expert, February 28). And independent Bashkir publicist Shamil Valiyev posed a dramatic question in a piece published three weeks into the conflict, “Do we, the peoples of the Volga region, need this war if, today, we ourselves do not have normal democratic self-government in our republics?” (Region.expert, March 14).

According to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, the Russian military has lost more soldiers—purportedly over 20,000—in the first 48 days of its war against Ukraine than the Soviet Union lost in 10 years of war in Afghanistan or that Russia lost in the two Chechen wars (TSN, April 13). It is no longer possible to hide such mortality figures. A page has appeared on the Russian social network Vkontakte that reports on Russian service members who died in Ukraine (Vk.com, accessed April 18). It also provides data on where they were called up from—places such as Khabarovsk, Omsk and Tatarstan. But conspicuously, there are practically no Muscovites on this list, even though this is the largest metropolis in Russia (Tjournal.ru, April 13; BBC News—Russian service, April 6).

All this seems to imply the emergence of what can be termed “imperial racism”: First, Moscow, the metropolitan center, monopolizes the function of proclaiming aggressive militaristic propaganda, broadcast throughout the country from the Ostankino TV tower. Second, Vladimir Putin wants to loudly celebrate his “victory” in the Ukrainian “special operation” on Moscow’s Red Square on May 9, the date commemorating the Soviet Union’s victory over Nazi Germany. And third, the inhabitants of the Russian regions, including the national republics, have notably become “cannon fodder” in this war, forced to die for the Kremlin myth of the “Russian World” (“Russkiy Mir”).

However, not all Russian soldiers are complying. They may be ready to defend their country, but many do not want to participate in aggression against their neighbors. So far, large numbers of military personnel from Pskov, Khakassia and more than ten other regions have refused to go to Ukraine. For this they were fired and threatened with criminal charges (BBC News—Russian service, April 7; Current Time TV, April 9).

The spring draft to the Russian Armed Forces, which began in April, is taking place in crisis conditions, with many conscripts fearing being sent straight into combat; even the Russian defense ministry has acknowledged these facts (Meduza, March 31; see EDM, March 31). Apparently, this lack of soldiers has forced the Russian military to start a covert mobilization, because declaring an open mobilization would be tantamount to admitting defeat. According to Ukrainian General Staff, this secretive call-up is especially active in the Krasnodar and Perm regions and the republics of Dagestan, Kalmykia and Ingushetia (Facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua, April 4). Enlisted soldiers from there are forced to sign military contracts, while those with combat experience are lured with promises of higher pay. In addition, they are permitted to take “trophies,” hence the widespread looting by the Russian army in Ukraine (see EDM, April 13).

All the sitting governors in Russia, emulating the Kremlin, have undergone a militaristic frenzy. However, in the context of the growing economic crisis, their popularity is sharply declining. The well-known Russian geographer and economist

Natalya Zubarevich believes that the war and ever-tightening international sanctions have sharply undermined the economies of especially those regions reliant on foreign cooperation, such as Sakha, Khabarovsk and Sakhalin (Sibir.Realii, April 8). Therefore, the Kremlin is now considering canceling gubernatorial elections, which were already mostly a formality, and returning to the direct appointment of governors by the president (Kommersant, March 21). But the fissures now splitting the Russian Federation will not be so easily sewn up. (Jamestown).

You make your bed – you lie in it.

## NATO

**Prospect of Russia using nuclear arms in Ukraine fuels Finland's NATO debate** - The prospect of Russia using nuclear weapons in Ukraine is a key factor behind Finland's debate over whether to join NATO, the country's foreign minister has said.

Yesterday, the Finnish parliament started its much-anticipated debate over the possibility of submitting a membership bid to NATO. Recent polls have shown a dramatic U-turn in public opinion in Finland, with the majority now favoring joining NATO after the invasion of Ukraine.

## Humanitarian

**UN Agency Says More Than 5 Million Refugees Have Left Ukraine** - The UN refugee agency says that the number of Ukrainians who have fled their country since Russia launched its unprovoked invasion has now surpassed 5 million in what is Europe's largest influx of refugees since World War II.

According to data published by the UN's refugee agency (UNHCR) on April 20, 5,034,439 Ukrainians have left the country because of the war, launched by Russia on February 24.

The UN said 90 percent of those who have fled are women and children, as the authorities in Kyiv have not allowed men of military age to leave the country.

The UN said on April 5 that about 7.1 million people have been displaced within Ukraine because of the war.

**'Shocked' Spanish PM Tours Carnage In Borodyanka During Surprise Visit To Ukraine** - Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez and Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen made a surprise visit to Kyiv for talks with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

Sanchez said in a tweet after visiting the town of Borodyanka on April 21 that he was "shocked to witness the horror and atrocities of [Russian President Vladimir] Putin's war on the streets of Borodyanka."

"We will not leave the Ukrainian people alone," he added.

The visit came just hours after police in the town, located just northwest of Kyiv, said the bodies of nine civilians had been found with some showing signs of torture.

Similar scenes have been found in other areas around the capital and elsewhere in Ukraine after Russia pulled back its troops to redeploy them in the east after encountering stiff resistance from Ukrainian troops as they tried to move toward Kyiv.

**European Council Chief Michel Says Justice Must Be Done In Ukraine Over Possible War Crimes** - European Council President Charles Michel, visiting Ukraine in a show of support for the Eastern European nation as it fights to repel Moscow's unprovoked invasion, says there must be justice for alleged atrocities committed by Russian forces.

A recent retreat by Russian forces from towns such as Bucha and Borodyanka have revealed harrowing evidence of brutal killings, torture, mass graves and the indiscriminate targeting of civilians in the fighting.

**Preliminary Agreement Reached On Evacuating Women, Children, Elderly** From Mariupol, Says Ukrainian Government - Kyiv has reached a preliminary agreement with Russia on creating a humanitarian corridor to evacuate women, children, and the elderly from the besieged city of Mariupol on April 20, Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk said.

"We managed to pre-agree a humanitarian corridor for women, children and older people," she wrote on Facebook. "Given the catastrophic humanitarian situation in Mariupol, this is where we will focus our efforts today."

**Biden announces a new program to help Ukrainian refugees enter the U.S.** - Biden announced a new program today that will expedite the U.S. immigration process for Ukrainian refugees fleeing Russia's invasion.

The "Unite for Ukraine" program will allow Americans to sponsor individual Ukrainian refugees, provided they can financially support them.

In March, Biden pledged that the U.S. would accept as many as 100,000 refugees from Ukraine. But until now, there was no specific information on how the process would work.

**Images Of Mass Grave Near Mariupol Released** - Maxar Technologies has released an image that shows an alleged mass grave near the besieged city of Mariupol. The images show a trench in the village of Mangush that is more than 300 meters long. It could contain thousands of bodies, said Petr Andryushchenko, an adviser to the city's mayor.

## Impacts

**2 Russian oligarchs were found dead one day apart alongside their wives and children** - Two Russian oligarchs were found dead alongside their wives and children one day apart, according to multiple reports.

Vladislav Avayev, the former vice president of Gazprombank, was found dead of a gunshot wound in his Moscow apartment on Monday, Russia's state-run TASS news agency reported.

The Moscow investigations department did not name the victims in its public statement about the case, but TASS said an unnamed source confirmed their identities.

More than 2,000 miles away, in Spain, another oligarch — Sergei Protosenya — was found hanged, with his wife and daughter stabbed to death, Spanish TV channel Telecinco reported. His body was found Tuesday, Spanish outlet El Punta Vui reported. He was found with a bloodstained knife and an ax at his side, Telecinco reported.

Protosenya was the former vice president and chief accountant of Novatek, a major gas company with close connections to Gazprombank.

Neither of the men were on an international sanctions list in the Ukraine-Russia conflict.

**Georgia and Ukraine Try to Demonstrate Unity in the Face of Russian Aggression** - On April 16, a multi-party delegation of the Georgian parliament, on a visit to Ukraine, traveled to the Kyiv suburb of Bucha, where, according to multiple Western governments and representatives of the International Criminal Court, the Russian occupying forces committed war crimes against the civilian population (see EDM, April 13). The speaker of the Georgian parliament, Shalva Papuashvili, was accompanied by the chairperson of Ukraine's national legislature (the Verkhovna Rada), Ruslan Stefanchuk. All members of the Georgian parliamentary delegation from the ruling Georgian Dream party as well as from the opposition parties Lelo and Citizen expressed support for the Ukrainian people, who faced the "horror of an aggressive war" unleashed by the Russian authorities (Imedineews.ge, April 17).

**Founder of Lukoil steps down** - The founder and co-owner of Lukoil, Russia's largest private oil company, has resigned days after he and other Russian tycoons were sanctioned by Australia and the UK.

In a statement on April 21, Lukoil said that the 71-year-old billionaire, Vagit Alekperov, decided to step down as the company's president and resign as a member of Lukoil's board of directors. No reason was given for the moves.

**From soaring food prices to social unrest, the fallout from the Russia-Ukraine war could be immense** - As the war approaches its third month, economic fallout from the conflict is becoming clearer and the outlook does not look good.

Against an already turbulent backdrop of global inflationary pressures amid rising food and energy prices and disrupted supply chains following the coronavirus pandemic, the war between Russia and Ukraine is exacerbating supply and demand tensions, damaging consumer sentiment and is threatening global economic growth.

Investors are rattled by rampant inflation and its dampening effect on global growth — the IMF predicts the U.S. inflation rate will reach 7.7% this year and 5.3% in the euro zone. Concerns over rising prices are prompting investors to sell bonds, pushing yields higher; the yield on the benchmark 10-year Treasury note touched 2.94% Tuesday, a level not seen since late 2018.

“Forget the geopolitical ramifications for a moment. The waves of tectonic economic instability unleashed by the Ukraine conflict have shocked and caught the global commentariat of politicians, central bankers, economists and investment analysts off guard,” Bill Blain, strategist at Shard Capital, said in emailed comments Thursday.

“Inflation from agribusinesses, energy and supply chains is spinning unchecked – and, like a nuclear reaction, they are triggering a host of follow up consequences. It feels a little bit like Chernobyl – the reactor is going critical! Our cozy assumptions about how the interconnected globalized economy was supposed to work are being rocked to the core.”

“Russia is a major supplier of oil, gas, and metals, and, together with Ukraine, of wheat and corn. Reduced supplies of these commodities have driven their prices up sharply,” the IMF said Tuesday. Jari Stehn, chief European economist at Goldman Sachs, told CNBC Wednesday that the impact of the war in Ukraine was already putting the brakes on Europe's economy.

There are six breadbaskets that together supply roughly 60 to 70% of global agricultural commodities. The Ukraine–Russia region is responsible for roughly 30% of global exports of wheat and 65% of sunflower, in a context where those markets are increasingly tight and interconnected—so a slight disruption in supply creates some impact on price.

**Ramaphosa breaks silence** - President Cyril Ramaphosa has broken his silence and finally spoken to his Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelensky.

This is the first time Ramaphosa has spoken to Zelensky since the invasion of Ukraine by Russia almost two months ago after having already spoken to his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin.

In a tweet shared on Wednesday, Zelensky said he and Ramaphosa discussed the ongoing situation with Russia and other issues, including fears of a looming global food crisis.

South Africa has been heavily criticized for repeatedly calling for Russia and Ukraine to maintain the momentum of peace talks and resolve disputes through dialogue and negotiations, which placed the South African government under fire for its neutral stance after failing to condemn the war. Ramaphosa has also blamed the conflict on NATO, saying it had pushed Russia into a confrontation.

South Africa and Russia are both members of the BRICS Alliance – **B**razil – **R**ussia – **I**ndia – **C**hina – **S**outh Africa. None of the other members has criticized Russia or Putin to date.

## Containment

**Denmark's prime minister pledged to send more weapons to Ukraine** during a trip to Kyiv, where she and her Spanish counterpart Pedro Sanchez were meeting President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in a gesture of support.

**General Mud and “terramechanics”** – (Terramechanics is defined as the “interaction of soil with off road vehicles.”) Ukraine’s mud became a secret weapon in its defense against Russia - When Russia invaded Ukraine in February, its military commanders were widely seen to have discounted one very unconventional but effective weapon in Ukraine’s arsenal: its infamous muddy season.

The timing of Russia’s invasion, which began on Feb. 24, coincided with what is known locally as the “muddy road season,” or “Rasputitsa” in Russian. Mud can make Ukraine’s terrain and unpaved roads virtually unpassable.

It’s a phenomenon familiar in the history books: Napoleon Bonaparte’s invasion of Russia in 1812 was famously slowed by the mud, as were Hitler’s armies, which invaded the then-Soviet Union in 1941 and encountered the same logistical problems posed by the mud and inhospitable terrain that Russian troops have faced in the last few weeks.

**Biden Announces New \$800 Million In Military Aid For Ukraine** - U.S. President Joe Biden says the United States will send another \$800 million in military support to Ukraine to help the country defend against Russian forces in the Donbas region. Biden said the weapons will go “directly to the front lines of defending freedom” to support brave Ukrainian forces and civilians who are fighting the Russian invasion in the region.

"We’re in a critical window now, of time where they’re going to set the stage for the next phase of this war,” Biden said, speaking at the White House earlier today. The US and allies are “moving as fast as possible” to provide Ukraine with the equipment and weapons it needs, he added.

The new package will ensure the steady flow of weapons into Ukraine over the next few weeks, Biden said. It includes heavy weapons such as artillery, howitzers, 144,000 rounds of ammunition, and tactical drones. It comes on top of \$800 million in aid announced last week.

The US will also continue to share timely intelligence with Ukrainian forces and facilitate the delivery of weapons from other allies and partners from around the world, Biden said. He also announced \$500 million in direct economic assistance that the United States will provide to Ukraine to help the country stabilize its economy.

Biden said he will ask Congress next week to approve billions more dollars in aid for Ukraine because the \$13.6 billion assistance package passed last month is “almost exhausted.”

**493rd and 495th Fighter Squadrons Have Received Their Flagship F-35A Aircraft** - The jets are the latest additions to the 48th Fighter Wing at RAF Lakenheath. On Friday Apr. 15, 2022, two F-35A aircraft, both sporting the squadron commander markings for the 493rd Fighter Squadron ‘Reapers’ and 495th Fighter Squadron ‘Valkyries,’ landed at RAF Lakenheath, UK. The two aircraft coming from Lockheed Martin’s facility in Fort Worth, Texas.

The jets have tried to make the transatlantic crossing for at least two weeks but suffered delays caused by tanker issues and unfavorable weather over the Atlantic. For the ferry flight, the aircraft were supported by Air Refueling Wing from McConnell Air Force Base, Kansas, which also arrived at RAF Lakenheath. (The Aviationist).

**SpaceX shut down a Russian electromagnetic warfare attack in Ukraine last month** — and the Pentagon is taking notes. Russia’s halting efforts to conduct electromagnetic warfare in Ukraine show how important it is to quickly respond, and immediately shut down, such attacks, Pentagon experts said Wednesday.

Dave Tremper, director of electronic warfare for the Office of the Secretary of Defense, pointed to SpaceX's ability last month to swiftly stymie a Russian effort to jam its Starlink satellite broadband service, which was keeping Ukraine connected to the Internet. SpaceX founder Elon Musk steered thousands of Starlink terminals to Ukraine after an official sent him a tweet asking for help keeping the besieged country online.

"The next day [after reports about the Russian jamming effort hit the media], Starlink had slung a line of code and fixed it," Tremper said. "And suddenly that [Russian jamming attack] was not effective anymore. From [the] EW technologist's perspective, that is fantastic ... and how they did that was eye-watering to me."

### **Meet 'Phoenix Ghost,' the US Air Force's new drone designed for Ukraine's war with Russia** - "The Phoenix

Ghost was rapidly developed by the Air Force, in response specifically to Ukrainian requirements," a senior defense official told reporters. "This is a great example of adapting to their needs in real time."

The United States will provide more than 121 of these UAV systems which are manufactured by AEVEX Aerospace, the Pentagon announced today.



The Phoenix Ghost is similar to the Switchblade unmanned systems previously delivered to Ukraine, the official said, in that it is a "one way drone" that is "clearly designed to give a punch" to a number of different types of targets. This likely means that Phoenix Ghost is a low-cost, single-use suicide drone that behaves like a loitering munition — flying around an airspace before ramming itself into a target.

These American-provided weapons have proven lethally effective to date against Russian heavy armor.

### **Defeating Putin — now — is an economic imperative** - He might secretly be the world's richest person, but Russian President Vladimir Putin is also the world's greatest value destroyer.

The IMF estimates that Putin's invasion of Ukraine will lower world economic growth by eight-tenths of a percentage point this year and two-tenths next year. That might not sound like a lot, but given the size of the world economy, it amounts to about \$935 billion in lost output, roughly equivalent to zeroing out the entire economy of Turkey or the Netherlands. The toll could easily top \$1 trillion if the war drags on or escalates.

This is the destruction caused by one man demanding the ruination of a large, peaceful and productive country. It's not an unstoppable virus, a complex financial contagion or an unforeseen natural disaster. The cost of Putin's fanaticism is obviously acute in Ukraine, which is suffering thousands of deaths and hundreds of billions of dollars of damage to civilian infrastructure. But Putin's war is raising the cost of fuel, grain and other vital products literally everywhere. It will cost lives and lower living standards in dozens of nations nowhere near the battlefields.

There may never be a better opportunity to defang Putin. Russian forces spectacularly failed to capture Ukraine's capital, Kyiv to impose a puppet government, retreating in disarray, exposing vast holes in a military looted from top to bottom, like the entire Russian economy. Old, neglected equipment broke down routinely. Undisciplined troops employed lazy tactics. Broken supply lines left units short of food and fuel. Intercepted phone calls revealed panicked Russian conscripts desperate to escape and, in some cases, refusing to fight. In southern Ukraine, coastal defense troops sank the Russian navy's Black Sea flagship, the Moskva, destroying a \$750 million fighting platform with two missiles costing perhaps a couple million dollars. Putin's military may be more vulnerable than at any time during his two-decade rule.

Despite that, Russian forces now seem to be launching a new campaign to carve off as much of eastern and southern Ukraine as they can get. At some point, Putin may seek a “peace” settlement that leaves Russia in control of whatever territory it can take and keep.

There can be no peace with Putin. The Ukraine invasion is at least Putin’s fourth attempt in 15 years to take neighboring territory with force and kluge together some remnants of the old USSR. Putin’s territorial gains to date would seal off Ukraine’s access to ports on the Sea of Azov, and he probably aims to capture Ukraine’s Black Sea coastline as well, leaving it no seaports to the outside world. If Putin could accomplish that, he would have military force on the border of tiny Moldova, where he also has territorial ambitions. Moldova isn’t a NATO member, but it borders Romania, which is.

China’s communist rulers, meanwhile, are watching closely, to see if democratic powers have the mettle and attention span to stop the sort of aggression they may someday attempt in Taiwan or other parts of Asia.

The Western goal at this point should be a complete Ukrainian victory, with all Russian forces out of the country. Leave Putin in power in Russia; regime change is a reckless goal. NATO shouldn’t send troops, but Western nations should supply everything short of that and maximize the economic pressure on Russia, to end Putin’s medieval adventurism once and for all.

As for military aid, Eliot Cohen of the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies argues that the United States should boost the value of materiel support for Ukraine from several billion dollars to tens of billions and include heavy weapons that could be decisive on the battlefield, such as tanks and artillery. The Biden administration is moving in that direction, but Cohen, writing in the Atlantic, says the pivot is too slow, given that “decisive action is urgently required to tip the balance between a costly success and a calamity.”

**Russian envoy: We’ll ‘respond accordingly’ if Israel gives Ukraine defensive gear** - Russia’s envoy to Israel warned Thursday that Moscow will respond if Jerusalem supplies Kyiv with defensive gear amid his country’s invasion of Ukraine.

Speaking with Russian state television, Ambassador Anatoly Viktorov noted Defense Ministry Benny Gantz’s announcement a day earlier that Israel will provide Ukraine with helmets and flak jackets.

Gantz’s office stressed the equipment will go to Ukrainian civilian rescue and medical forces, not the military.

## Sanctions

**Four More Russian Billionaires Blacklisted By EU To Lose Cypriot Citizenship** - Cyprus says it will strip its citizenship from four more Russian billionaires as the EU member continues to pull passports from those who have fallen under the bloc's sanctions over Moscow's unprovoked war against Ukraine.

Deputy government spokeswoman Niovi Parisinou said in a written statement yesterday that 11 members of the billionaires' families will also lose their citizenship in the move.

In line with government policy, the names of those affected were not released, but according to local media reports on earlier today, Russian tycoons Oleg Deripaska and Igor Kesayev; Grigory Beryozkin, the owner of the newspaper Komsomolskaya Pravda and RBK media-holding; and Gulbakhor Ismailova, a sister of Russian oligarch Alisher Usmanov, will lose their Cypriot citizenship, along with their dependents.

The four billionaires and family members received Cypriot citizenship through a so-called Golden Passport program that allows investors to obtain Cypriot passports. Almost 3,000 Russians have participated in the cash-for-passports scheme

to date. Deripaska obtained his citizenship in 2017 and Ismailova in 2015, while Beryozkin and Kesayev received theirs in 2012.

Last week, Cypriot media reported that four other Russian billionaires -- Mikhail Gutseriyev, Aleksandr Ponomarenko, Vadim Moshkovich, and Aleksei Kuzmichyov -- will be stripped of the Cypriot citizenship on the same grounds.

**U.S. Issues New Russia Sanctions Targeting People, Entities For Evading Existing Sanctions** - The US yesterday imposed another round of sanctions, this time hitting more than 40 people and entities for allegedly attempting to evade penalties previously imposed on Russia.

In addition, 48 people believed to have violated the sovereignty, territorial integrity, or political independence of Ukraine were hit with visa restrictions alongside 17 others accused of undermining democracy in Belarus.

**Germany will end Russian oil imports by end of year, foreign minister says** - "We will halve oil by the summer and will be at 0 by the end of the year, and then gas will follow, in a joint European roadmap, because our joint exit, the complete exit of the European Union, is our common strength," German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock added.

**Chinese credit card processor rebuffs Russian banks** - China's credit card processor has refused to work with banks in Russia for fear of being targeted by sanctions over its war on Ukraine, cutting off a possible alternative after Visa and Mastercard stopped serving them, according to the Russian news outlet RBC.

UnionPay's decision affects Sberbank, Russia's biggest commercial bank, and smaller institutions, RBC reported yesterday. It cited five unidentified sources in large Russian banks.

**Russia Declares Diplomats Of Baltic Countries' Embassies Personae Non-grata** - After various European countries including the Baltic countries expelled Russian ambassadors, Moscow today retaliated by announcing that all the workers of Baltic embassies, which includes Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania will be deemed personae non-grata. As per the reports of Sputnik, the Russian Foreign Ministry announced on Thursday that it had summoned the ambassadors of Latvia and Estonia, as well as Lithuania's charge d'affaires, and handed them protest notes in response to these nations' unfriendly activities.

**China and India are saving Russia from economic collapse** - Russia hasn't felt the pressure as planned by the West. The blame largely lies with India and China. Neither country has explicitly sided with or against Russia, and instead have stood a murky middle ground while the majority of the world's nations condemn Putin. They've also continued to buy Russian energy, indirectly funding the invasion of Ukraine while maintaining the same trade relationships they had before the war began.

## Widening of War

**Ukraine Rejects Serbian Claim That It Is Behind Threats Against Flights To Russia** - Ukraine has rejected accusations made by Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic that the Ukrainian secret service is behind a series of hoax bomb threats against Air Serbia flights to Russia.

Vucic has claimed, without providing evidence, that the foreign intelligence services of Ukraine and an unidentified EU nation are behind the threats.

"[Vucic's] statements about Ukraine's alleged involvement in bomb threats to Serbian air carriers flying to Russia are false," Ukrainian Foreign Ministry spokesman Oleh Nikolenko said in a statement.

Other Serbian officials have alleged that the threats had been sent from either Ukraine or Poland.

Serbia voted in favor of three UN resolutions condemning Russia's war against Ukraine but has rejected joining international sanctions against Moscow.

We have written about the Russian widening of the conflict via a Serbian front previously. Watch this space.

**Ukraine's "most fragile" neighbor welcomes Western wake-up call** - The war in Ukraine has awakened the U.S. and EU to the reality that engagement with former Soviet and Eastern Bloc states can't continue at the "snail's speed" of the past three decades, Moldova's Foreign Minister Nicu Popescu tells Axios.

In the case of Moldova, a tiny landlocked country wedged between Ukraine and Romania, already an EU member state but not of NATO, it's become home to about 100,000 refugees who've fled Ukraine.

Those refugees now account for 3.5% of Moldova's population, and 10% of its youth. That affects "every single little piece of the functioning of Moldova's state and society," Popescu says.

**Russian cyber attacks** - Cyber authorities "urge critical infrastructure network defenders to prepare for and mitigate potential cyber threats — including destructive malware, ransomware, DDoS attacks, and cyber espionage — by hardening their cyber defenses and performing due diligence in identifying indicators of malicious activity," the CISA advisory states.

Citing "evolving intelligence," the CISA, along with the FBI, NSA and cybersecurity authorities from Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the UK released the joint advisory in wake of increased threats by Russian cyber groups targeting critical infrastructure both within and outside the Ukraine region. (Breakingdefense).

**Russia planned to invade Belarus after Lukashenko was reelected – GUR** - Russia may have also made plans to invade its neighboring country and close ally Belarus, in addition to its ongoing invasion of Ukraine, the Ukrainian Intelligence Directorate (GUR) claimed Tuesday.

The report cites documents obtained by Ukraine's military intelligence service, which seem to depict Russian preparations to mobilize troops to invade and seize Belarusian territory.

While Russia's plans to invade countries have been proven in the past, such as the 2008 invasion of Georgia and the 2014 and current invasions of Ukraine, invading Belarus may seem odd. The Eastern European country is one of Russia's closest allies and relations between the two nations are very strong.

Further, unlike Ukraine, where President Volodymyr Zelensky has been vocal about his opposition to Russia for years, Belarus's President Alexander Lukashenko has much warmer views regarding Moscow and frequently meets with President Vladimir Putin. Russia also has equal status with Belarusian in the country, trade ties are strong, and deals have been established to let citizens of both countries travel, work and study between them freely.

But it is with Lukashenko where this motivation – or rather, a pretext – to invade seems to lie. According to the documents presented by the GUR, Russia planned to invade and suppress anti-Lukashenko protests. Further, the GUR argued that it also was planned under the pretext of avoiding Russian involvement in Europe or a large-scale conflict with NATO.