

# Conflict Update # 334

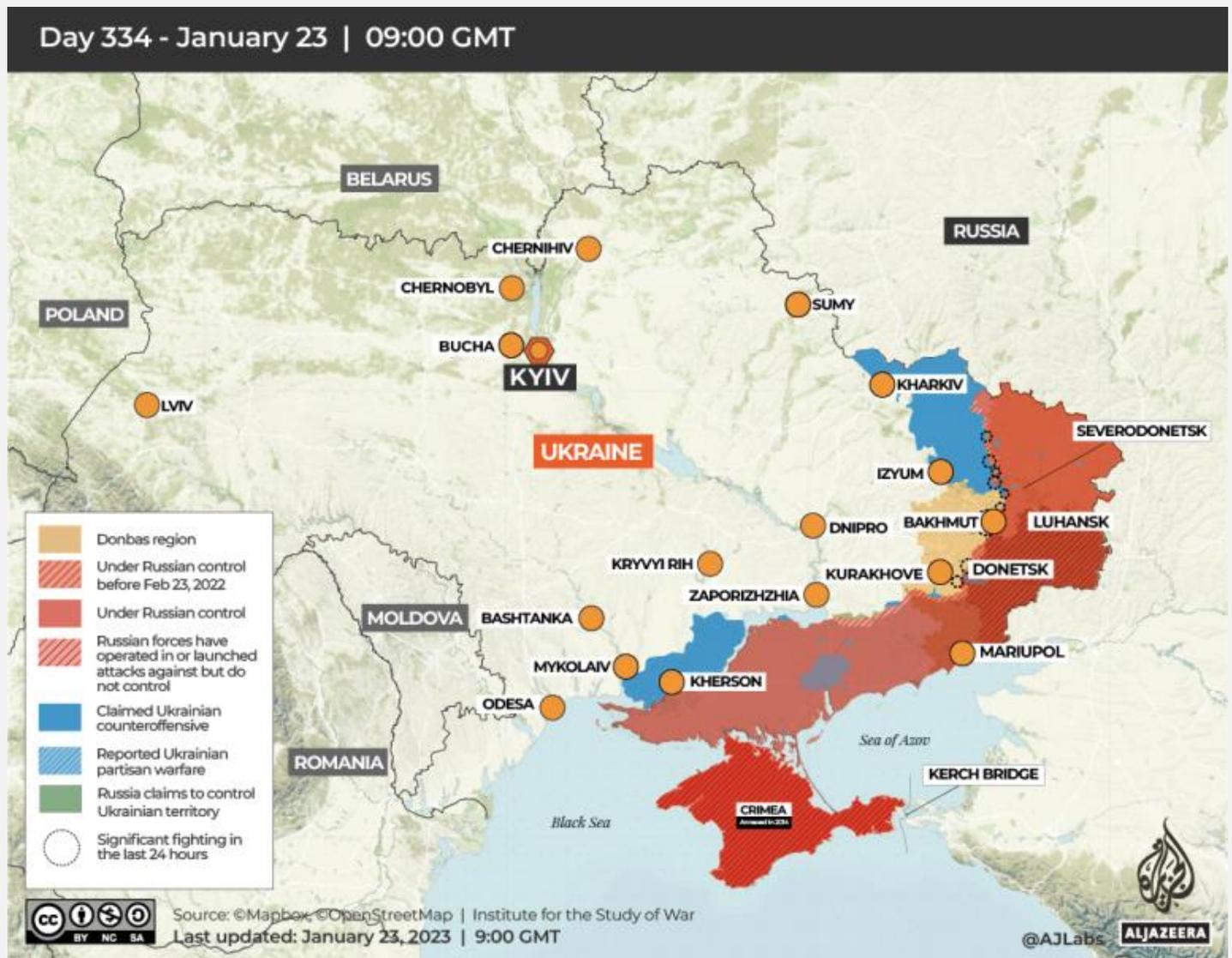
January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2023

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## Conflict Assessment

**Russian losses<sup>1</sup>** – 121,480 (720) soldiers killed, 3,150 (+5) enemy tanks, 6,276 (+8) armored combat vehicles, 2,146 (+2) artillery systems, 447 (+2) MLRS systems, 220 (+0) air defense systems, 287 (+0) warplanes, 277 (+0) helicopters, 1,894 (+2) UAVs of the operational-tactical level, 749 (+0) cruise missiles, 18 (+1) warships/cutters, 4,936 (+4) trucks and tankers, 4 Iskander Missile Launchers (+0), 239 fuel bowsers (+0) and 193 (+0) units of equipment.

## Key Takeaways



**Russia plans to send its strongest tanks to drive around Ukraine but is 'too scared to put them in combat'<sup>13</sup>** - Russia may be about to deploy its newest and most powerful tanks to Ukraine, the UK's defense ministry

said on Thursday — but with a catch. The update from UK officials said that the T-14 Armata may soon be seen in Ukraine, but probably wouldn't feature in any actual fighting.

The ministry cited satellite imagery showing T-14s in one of Russia's pre-deployment training zones to support its claim they would soon be in Ukraine.

Making use of the tanks would be a "high-risk decision" for Russia because they are still so new, the ministry said, adding that Russian commanders "are unlikely to trust the vehicle in combat."



**Russia accuses Ukraine of storing Western arms at nuclear sites<sup>2</sup>** - Russia's foreign intelligence service accused Ukraine of storing Western-supplied arms at nuclear power stations.

The agency said in a statement that US-supplied HIMARS rocket launchers, air defence systems and artillery ammunition had been delivered to the Rivne Nuclear Power Plant in the northwestern city of Varash.

"The Ukrainian armed forces are storing weapons and ammunition provided by the West on the territory of nuclear power plants," the agency said, adding that an arms shipment to the Rivne power station had taken place in the last week of December.

**The Kremlin has warned that the people of Ukraine will "pay the price"<sup>3</sup>** if the west decides to send tanks to support Kyiv. Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said the splits in Europe over whether to provide tanks to Kyiv showed there was increasing "nervousness" within the Nato alliance. Peskov also dismissed Washington's announcement that it was planning to impose sanctions on the Russian private mercenary Wagner Group.

**Russian forces continue to "endure operational deadlock and heavy casualties"<sup>3</sup>**, according to the UK MoD's latest intelligence update. The report also says new disciplinary measures introduced by Valery Gerasimov, Russia's chief of the general staff and newly appointed commander in Ukraine, have been met with "skeptical feedback", in particular in response to the decision to ban soldiers from wearing beard.

**Update** - 18 people injured as a result of last weekend's rocket attack on a high-rise building in Dnipro remain in hospital, including one child. Ukraine state broadcaster reports "There are no serious patients among these patients, all of them were transferred from intensive care units to general departments."

## Diplomacy

**Turkey's president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan<sup>3</sup>, has said he will not support Sweden's Nato membership bid after a protest in Stockholm at the weekend that included the burning of a copy of the Qur'an** - Protests in the Swedish capital on Saturday have heightened tensions with Turkey at a time when the Nordic country needs Ankara's backing to gain entry to the military alliance.

Ankara has been under increasing pressure from Swedish and Finnish officials as well as the Nato chief, Jens Stoltenberg, to approve Sweden and Finland's accession since the three countries signed a trilateral memorandum during a Nato summit in Madrid last June.

The two Nordic countries agreed to address security concerns raised by Turkey, namely the presence of Kurdish organisations in Sweden that Ankara claims have links to the Kurdistan Workers' party (PKK), which Turkey, the EU and Washington have designated a terrorist group.

But speaking today after a cabinet meeting, Erdoğan said:

*"Those who allow such blasphemy in front of our embassy (in Stockholm) can no longer expect our support for their Nato membership."*

He also criticized Swedish authorities for allowing the demonstration to take place outside the Turkish embassy in Stockholm.

He added:

*"So you will let terror organisations run wild and then expect our support for getting into Nato. That's not happening."*

If Sweden would not show respect to Turkey or Muslims, then "they won't see any support from us on the Nato issue," he said.

**Comment** – As we have commented previously, Turkey is seeking to eliminate the Kurds as a nation and certainly those within Turkey's borders. The US is also bringing pressure to bear on Erdogan who has made a request to buy 40 American F-16 fighter jets and nearly 80 modernization kits for its existing warplanes, as Turkey looks to modernize its Air Force after the purchase of F-35 jets fell through, sources familiar with the matter said.

**Lavrov visits South Africa in trip condemned as insensitive<sup>2</sup>** - Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov is in South Africa to hold talks with his counterpart in Pretoria.

The South African government said the talks with Naledi Pandor are routine, but opposition parties have condemned the visit as insensitive.

Pandor has insisted that South Africa will not be dragged into taking sides in the Ukraine war and has criticized the West for its selective condemnation of Russia while ignoring other acts of aggression, such as the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory.

The South African military is to host a joint military exercise with Russia and China from February 17 to 27, which coincides with the first anniversary of the conflict.

**Russia blames West for no Ukraine talks, defends navy drills<sup>3</sup>** - Russia was willing to negotiate with Ukraine in the early months of the war, but the US and other Western nations advised Kyiv against holding talks, Moscow's top diplomat said on Monday.

Russian FM Lavrov's remarks on a visit to South Africa were similar to those made last year by Putin.

The US and other Western nations have said that Russia isn't serious about hammering out a deal to end the nearly year-long war, which began on February 24.

"It is well known that we supported the proposal of the Ukrainian side to negotiate early in the special military operation and by the end of March, the two delegations agreed on the principle to settle this conflict," Lavrov said.

"It is well known and was published openly that our American, British, and some European colleagues told Ukraine that it is too early to deal, and the arrangement which was almost agreed was never revisited by the Kyiv regime."

Russia has repeatedly rejected Ukrainian and Western demands that it withdraw completely from Ukraine as a condition for any negotiations.

US President Biden has indicated he would be willing to talk with Putin, if the Russian leader demonstrated that he seriously wanted to end the invasion.

Lavrov is in Pretoria for talks with South African counterpart Naledi Pandor as Russia pushes to strengthen ties with Africa's most developed country and an historical ally amid the ongoing conflict in Ukraine.

South Africa was seen as the most significant of several African nations to take a neutral stance on the war and refuse to condemn Russia's invasion — to the disappointment of the US and other Western partners who also view South Africa as pivotal to their plans to build relationships in Africa.

**Comment** – SA is a member of BRICS – **Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.**

**Latvia expels Russia's ambassador in solidarity with Estonia<sup>2</sup>** - Latvia's foreign minister says he has told Russia's ambassador in Riga to leave the country by February 24 in a decision taken in solidarity with Estonia.

Edgars Rinkevics said on Twitter: "Due to the ongoing brutal Russian aggression against Ukraine and in solidarity with Estonia, Latvia will lower level of diplomatic relations with Russia effective February 24, demanding Russia to act accordingly."

**'Total Russophobia': Russia downgrades relations with Estonia<sup>2</sup>** - Russia says it is downgrading diplomatic relations with NATO member Estonia, accusing the Baltic nation of "total Russophobia".

The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has ordered the Estonian envoy to leave next month. Both countries would be represented by an interim charge d'affaires instead of an ambassador.

"In recent years, the Estonian leadership has purposefully destroyed the entire range of relations with Russia," the ministry said. "Total Russophobia, the cultivation of hostility towards our country, has been elevated by Tallinn to the rank of state policy."

The move is in response to an Estonian decision to reduce the size of the Russian embassy in Tallinn, Moscow said.

**EU pre-accession talks should begin this year, Ukraine says<sup>2</sup>** - Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba says EU membership negotiations should start this year.

“We are convinced that pre-accession negotiations should begin as soon as possible after Ukraine has implemented the recommendations and the positive assessment of the European Commission,” Kuleba said in an online speech at an EU Foreign Affairs Council meeting in Brussels.

“Ukraine is making every effort, and I am convinced that we should start pre-accession negotiations by the end of 2023,” he said.

Kyiv officially applied for EU membership on February 28, four days after Russia invaded.

**Resolution of conflict will be harder if Ukraine continues to reject talks: Lavrov<sup>2</sup>** - Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov says the longer Ukraine rejects peace talks, the harder it will be to resolve the conflict.

Russia has repeatedly said it is open to talks, but Ukraine and the US say they see no sign that Moscow is serious about ending the war and instead suspect it of trying to buy time to regroup.

“The longer they [the Ukrainians] refuse, the harder it will be to find a solution,” Lavrov said at a news conference during a visit to South Africa.

**No new date for START treaty discussions: Russian minister<sup>2</sup>** - Russia says no new date has been set for talks with the US on the START nuclear arms treaty.

Sergei Ryabkov, the deputy foreign minister, said conditions were not suitable for new talks on the agreement, which caps the number of strategic nuclear warheads of each side.

“The situation does not, frankly speaking, allow for setting a new date, ... taking into account this escalation trend in both rhetoric and actions by the United States,” Interfax quoted Ryabkov as saying.

In November, talks between Moscow and Washington on resuming inspections under the new START nuclear arms reduction treaty were due to take place in Egypt, but Russia postponed them.

## Putin

**No evidence Putin has ‘ambitions’ to attack other nations<sup>6</sup>** - There is no evidence Putin has ambitions to attack other European nations beyond Ukraine, says The Australian’s Washington Correspondent Adam Creighton.

“Maybe he does – we don’t know inside his head,” he told Sky News host Cory Bernardi.

“But we just have to look at what he’s said and how he’s acted.”

**Russia could collapse into 'new states' after Ukrainian victory: Economist<sup>4</sup>** - A Ukrainian victory could lead to the fall of the Russia Federation as we know it, according to one European economist.

Timothy Ash, an associate fellow at the international affairs think tank Chatham House, believes it's inevitable that Russian President Vladimir Putin and his army will be defeated by Ukraine. As the war head into its eleventh month, Ash said the real issue looming over Moscow's invasion is what will happen to Putin's Russia, and whether history will repeat itself.

In an op-ed published by the Kyiv Post on Saturday, Ash, who has advised various governments on Ukraine-Russia policy, said that he believes Russia will break off into new states—resulting in the exact opposite of what Putin had hoped to achieve when he launched the invasion into Ukraine almost a year ago.

"I see a decent chance that we see the end of Putin and, while not my base case, I think it's possible we see a collapse of the Federation into many new states—as with the USSR in 1991," Ash wrote.

Given that Russia is currently divided into a total of 89 regions—including 21 republics, 6 federal territories, 2 federal cities (Moscow and St. Petersburg), 49 regions, 1 autonomous region and 10 autonomous areas—Ash predicts that there could be the creation of 20 new states if the Russia Federation collapses.

"Putin started this war to create a Greater Russia, but the likely net effect will be a Lesser Russia," Ash said.

In 1991, the dissolution of the Soviet Union (USSR) resulted in the end of the country's existence as a sovereign state and brought an end to President Mikhail Gorbachev's time as the USSR's de facto leader. It was the 1991 collapse that gave Ukraine its independence, and from which the fraught relations between Russia and Ukraine have unfolded.

Ash is not the only expert who has opined that the war in Ukraine may end in the collapse of Russia.

In a January 7 op-ed for Foreign Policy, Alexander Motyl, a professor of political science at Rutgers University-Newark and a specialist on Ukraine and Russia, said that if Putin were to leave office, it is likely that a "vicious power struggle" would follow, and in turn, "a disintegration of centralized control and breakup of the federation."

"We don't know who will win, but we can confidently predict that the power struggle will weaken the regime and distract Russia from what remains of its war effort," Motyl wrote. "If Russia survives this turmoil, it's likely to become a weak client state of China. If it does not, the map of Eurasia could look very different."

Bruno Tertrais, a geopolitical adviser at the French think tank Institut Montaigne, also said a second collapse of the Soviet Union is likely to come from the war in Ukraine.

"Not only has [Putin] failed to unify the Russian world (ruski mir), but his closest neighbors, thanks to the war, now seem to want to emancipate themselves," Tertrais wrote in December.

Janusz Bugajski, a senior fellow at the Jamestown Foundation, has warned that Western policymakers are gravely unprepared for an "impending" collapse of Russia.

"Instead of planning contingencies for external spillovers and capitalizing on Russia's de-imperialization, however, Western officials appear to be stuck in a bygone era, believing they can return to the post-Cold War status quo," he wrote in a January 12 op-ed for Politico.

He said in order for the West to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past, it must not presume that "the current empire is permanent."

### **Putin loses confidence in mercenary Wagner Group over futile attempts to seize Ukraine's Bakhmut<sup>8</sup>**

Putin no longer relies on the Wagner Group, Russia's notorious mercenary private military company, over its fruitless attempts to capture the town of Bakhmut, east Ukraine, and is now focused on reforming the regular army, US Institute for the Study of War (ISW) notes in its daily report.

"Wagner financier Yevgeny Prigozhin's star has begun to set after months of apparent rise following his failure to make good on promises of capturing Bakhmut with his own forces," the ISW underlines.

Putin is believed to have given Prigozhin and ex-head of the Joint Grouping of Forces in Ukraine Sergey Surovikin chances to show what drafted convicts and a campaign targeting Ukraine's civil infrastructure can achieve, the analysts note. However, both failed: the Wagner Group could not capture Bakhmut, while weekly strikes on Ukraine and its population yielded very few results apart from exhausting Russia's stockpile of high-precision missiles.

"Putin appears to have decided to turn away from relying on Prigozhin and his irregular forces and to put his trust instead in Gerasimov, Shoigu, and the conventional Russian military once more," the ISW writes. Earlier, the Russian leader handed command over the Russian troops in Ukraine to General Valery Gerasimov, while the Russian Defence Ministry on 17 January announced large-scale reforms to expand the Russian army.

According to the ISW experts, these reforms and appointments “mark a significant inflection in the Kremlin’s efforts to reconstitute its conventional military and a deemphasis of short-term mitigation efforts such as the use of irregular formations on the frontlines”.

## Impacts

**US prosecutors charge former FBI official over violating sanctions<sup>2</sup>** - US prosecutors said that a former top FBI official was charged with violating sanctions on Russia by receiving concealed payments from oligarch Oleg Deripaska.

According to federal prosecutors in Manhattan, Charles McGonigal, who led the agency’s counterintelligence division in New York, was arrested on Saturday on charges he agreed to investigate a rival oligarch in return for payments.

McGonigal, who led the FBI’s counterintelligence division in New York from 2016 to 2018, was arrested on Saturday. He is charged with working with a former Soviet diplomat-turned-Russian interpreter on behalf of Oleg Deripaska, a Russian billionaire.

Prosecutors said McGonigal, 54, also worked on Deripaska’s behalf in 2019 in a failed attempt to get the sanctions on him lifted, and that he took money from him in 2021 to investigate a rival oligarch.

McGonigal and the interpreter, Sergey Shestakov, are scheduled to appear in court in Manhattan on Monday. Both are being held at a federal jail in Brooklyn.

Deripaska is the founder of the Russian aluminum company Rusal. He was among two dozen Russian oligarchs and government officials blacklisted by Washington in 2018 in reaction to Russia’s alleged meddling in the 2016 US election.

**Zelenskyy promises to combat corruption after investigation into minister<sup>2</sup>** - Ukrainian police detained the deputy infrastructure minister on suspicion of receiving \$400,000 to facilitate the import of generators into Ukraine.

On Telegram, the president wrote: “Today, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine dismissed a deputy minister who was exposed by NABU [the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine].”

“I want this to be our signal to all those whose actions or behaviour violate the principle of justice,” the president said. “Of course, now, the main focus is on defence, foreign policy and war. But this does not mean that I do not see or hear what is being said in society at different levels.”

Zelenskyy added that measures to fight corruption would be announced this week.

**Russia will struggle to staff and equip any expanded army: UK<sup>10</sup>** - Russia's planned expansion of its army faces major obstacles, according to British intelligence.

In a Sunday intelligence update, the U.K.'s Ministry of Defence gave an assessment of Russia's plans after Sergei Shoigu, Russia's Defense Minister, said on January 17 that he planned to restructure the nation's armed forces.

The planned implementation between 2023 and 2026 would reportedly see an expansion to 1.5 million troops, an 11 percent increase on top of the previously announced enhancement to 1.35 million.

But British intelligence has questioned the possibility of meeting the target and said it signaled that Moscow believes there will be a threat for several years to come.

The MoD post read: "Shoigu also announced the re-establishment of Moscow and Leningrad military districts, a partial return to the Soviet era organization of forces in Western Russia. A new army corps is to be established in Karelia.

"Shoigu's plans signal that the Russian leadership highly likely assess that an enhanced conventional military threat will endure for many years beyond the current Ukraine war. However, Russia will likely struggle to staff and equip the planned expansion." (**Comment** – As laid out in our *“Projections”* update yesterday).

## Comments and Reports

**The basic difference between Russian and NATO approach to casualties in battle** – Western society is based upon the values of its citizens and how they construct their government. Among other characteristics, individual rights, justice, transparency, humanity and growth are all paramount to a successful democracy. The state is subordinate to its people.

In Russia however it is the other way around, it is all about the state, its central control system, the politburo or the Party. Everyone, every citizen, and every business and investment is subject to the needs of the government. They are all subordinate to the state.

When Russia sends soldiers and citizens to certain death in what we call their “meat grinder” approach, and when we comment that the Kremlin and Putin do not care about the attrition rate among their troops, this is precisely what their central control system stands for – everyone and everything is subordinate to the state. They don’t matter so long as the state survives and if that requires “sacrificial lambs,” then so be it.

So when the Kremlin mobilizes hundreds of thousands of citizens, provides them with little to no effective training and sends them to the front line sans proper equipment and supplies, they know that death is a high probability, if not a certainty. But – people do not matter in the overall central system, only the system matters.

**Russian TV admits Ukrainians with Western weapons are 'fierce' fighters<sup>4</sup>** - Russian state television guests acknowledged the "fierce" resistance of Ukrainian forces and the speed at which they mastered Western-supplied weapons in a clip circulating on social media Monday.

Though there were some initial expectations that Russia would sweep Ukraine's army in days when Putin launched his invasion last year, the war is now approaching its one-year anniversary as Ukrainian forces continue to resist Russian aggression. Ukraine's defense has been bolstered by weapons and other aid from Western allies, who have provided air defense systems, rocket launchers and armored personnel carriers.

Ukraine is closer than ever to obtaining Leopard 2 tanks, the type of heavy equipment Ukraine has long requested in order to fend off Russia's attacks. Polish President Andrzej Duda announced plans last week to provide Ukraine with a company of the tanks, but Poland requires Germany's permission to provide them to a non-NATO country.

Though Germany has been hesitant to send tanks to Ukraine, German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said Sunday that Germany would not attempt to stop Poland from providing them, the Associated Press reported. Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki said Monday that they would formally ask Germany for consent but also said that Poland would make its own decision if it lacks Germany's permission.

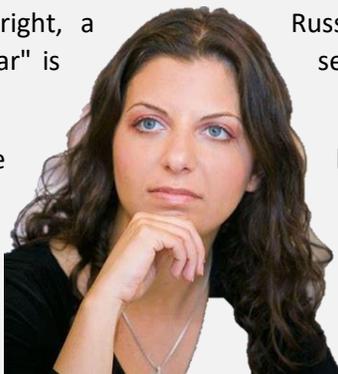
A group of Russian state television guests, whose names and titles were not immediately clear, discussed Western aid and Ukraine's continued resistance against Russian forces in the Twitter clip posted Monday by Anton Gerashchenko, an adviser in Ukraine's Ministry of Internal Affairs.

A second guest mentioned the Ukraine Defense Contact Group meeting in Ramstein, Germany, last week when participants were not able to come to a unanimous decision on supplying the Leopard 2 tanks. The second guest said that while the tanks have not yet been supplied, "they will be supplied tomorrow."

"We must be prepared for the worst scenarios," he added.

**Comment** – No Russian TV content is aired sans Putin’s and the Kremlin’s authorization. The point to determine here is that, with permission, the TV station and its guests are commenting on Ukrainian ability to resist and defeat numerically superior Russian forces. This must be aimed at Russian Main Street in the Kremlin’s ongoing effort to convince them that Russia needs to step up – mobilize and support Putin in his illegal invasion.

**Update** - Margarita Simonyan, pictured right, a state-sponsored RT, has said a that "big war" is following ultimatums made by Putin.



Russian state TV host and editor-in-chief of the set to commence by the end of winter,

In a clip that has gone viral on Twitter since that the conflict between Russia, the West are not met.

being posted on Sunday, Simonyan suggested and Ukraine may escalate if Putin's demands

She highlighted the peace talk demands and argued that neither side appears greater conflict.

that Putin announced in December last year willing to back down, which will result in a

## Containment

**A coordinated weapons package indicates continued Western support<sup>9</sup>** - Western and NATO support for the war effort in Ukraine has remained resolute, despite the potential for strain over rising fuel prices caused by sanctions on Russian energy, among other possible pain points. European nations and the US have supplied Ukraine with billions of dollars in weapons systems, training, equipment, ammunition, and humanitarian aid in the 11 months since the war broke out, efforts spearheaded by US leadership.

In the latest package — announced just two weeks after the US pledged its largest-ever tranche of aid to Ukraine — NATO and other partners pledged increased air defenses, like **Patriot launchers** and missiles from the Netherlands and Germany, in addition to what the US pledged in December. Those systems intercept incoming missiles like those Russia has been using to bombard Ukrainian critical infrastructure.

The US will also send additional **Bradley infantry fighting vehicles** as well as **Stryker armored personnel carriers, mine-resistant ambush-protected vehicles, and Humvees** — all of which will assist with greater battlefield mobility, particularly as Russian forces use land mines, even in civilian areas.

Sweden is sending its **Archer artillery system**, a type of howitzer that is extremely precise and easy to use, and allows for rapid redeployment of weaponry. These weapons systems fire long-range projectiles, and the Archer in particular is highly mobile, meaning it can deploy and move quickly. Denmark and Estonia are also donating **howitzers**.

The UK also pledged 14 of its **Challenger 2 tanks** — the first Western-style tanks sent to Ukraine during the conflict. Partners had previously provided Ukraine with Soviet-built tanks of its own and from former Warsaw Pact nations that have been decimated after a year of fighting. The new vehicles not only offer Ukraine modern tanks but also put some pressure on other partners to provide tanks of their own.

US politicians, including Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC) and House Foreign Affairs Committee Chair Rep. Michael McCaul (R-TX), have called on the US to send at least one Abrams to Ukraine in order to force Germany’s hand.

**Poland to seek Germany’s permission to send tanks<sup>2</sup>** - Poland will ask Germany for permission to send Leopard tanks to Ukraine, Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki says.

Warsaw is building a coalition of nations ready to send German-made Leopards, but even if there is no permission from Berlin, Warsaw will make its own decisions, Morawiecki added.

“Even if, eventually, we do not get this permission, we – within this small coalition – even if Germany is not in this coalition, we will hand over our tanks, together with the others, to Ukraine,” he said.

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said on Sunday that Poland hasn’t formally asked for Berlin’s approval, but “if we were asked, we would not stand in the way.”

Poland has reiterated that it is ready to send tanks to Ukraine without Germany’s consent and Morawiecki said his government would seek permission from Berlin to send its Leopard tanks to Ukraine, but described that consent as of “secondary importance”. But a German government spokesperson said Berlin had not yet received a request from Poland or any other country to authorize the transfer of Leopard 2 tanks to Ukraine.

**Germany begins moving Patriot missiles to Poland<sup>2</sup>** - Germany’s armed forces have begun moving the first two of three promised Patriot anti-aircraft missile squadrons to Poland.

## The Patriot weapon system

The Patriot weapon system is a long-range, all-altitude, all-weather air defence system to counter tactical ballistic missiles, cruise missiles and advanced aircraft. It is made by the US and is also used by some of its allies.

The infographic features a photograph of a Patriot missile being launched from a truck-mounted launcher. The missile is shown in mid-air, angled upwards, with a large plume of fire and smoke trailing behind it. The background is a clear blue sky. Technical specifications are listed in yellow and white text. The launcher is a large, dark-colored vehicle with a complex mechanical structure for the missile launchers.

Length <b>520 cm</b>	Range <b>70 km</b> (43 miles)	Max Altitude <b>More than 24 km</b> (15 miles)
Diameter <b>40 cm</b>	Warhead <b>High explosive</b>	Guidance <b>Track-Via-Missile</b>

Source: Army-technology.com | December 14, 2022

@AJLabs ALJAZEERA

The air defence systems are expected to be delivered near Zamosc in southeastern Poland by Wednesday afternoon.

"Patriot is a purely defensive system," said the head of the German forces in Poland, Colonel Jorg Sievers.

The aim, he said, is to protect NATO airspace as well as Poland's territory, infrastructure and population.

**Ukraine is raising funds to build a strike force of 1,000 kamikaze drones to help defeat Russia<sup>11</sup>** - Ukraine is raising funds to build a strike force of 1,000 kamikaze drones to help defeat Russia Business Insider 8h ago Quick Summary: A Ukrainian military intelligence unit is building a fleet of "first-person-view" drones for surveillance and to carry out attacks.

The Kryla, part of Ukraine's military-intelligence service, wants a fleet of 1,000 so-called first-person-view drones to help defend its front line against Russian forces.

The defense ministry said such drones could collect intelligence and essentially function as snipers from a distance of about 6 miles.

Funds are being raised through the "Starlife-Charity" foundation, which has helped Ukrainian forces since Russia invaded in February.

**Ukraine needs 'several hundred' tanks to retake territory: Official<sup>2</sup>** - Ukraine needs several hundred tanks from its Western allies to retake Russian-occupied territory, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's chief of staff said.

"We need tanks – not 10-20, but several hundred," the official, Andriy Yermak, wrote on Telegram.

"Our goal is [restoring] the borders of 1991 and punishing the enemy, who will pay for their crimes."

Ukraine's borders were established in 1991 following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

**'Nervousness' in NATO over tanks – Kremlin<sup>2</sup>** - The Kremlin says the hesitancy over whether to provide the German-made Leopard tanks to Kyiv shows increasing "nervousness" within the NATO military alliance.

"But of course, all countries which take part, directly or indirectly, in pumping weapons into Ukraine and raising its technological level bear responsibility" for continuing the conflict, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

**Hungary will not block EU move to provide more aid to Ukraine<sup>2</sup>** - Hungary will not block the EU from implementing a measure to provide more military aid to Ukraine, Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto says in a video on his Facebook page.

Szijjarto spoke as EU foreign ministers met in Brussels to discuss more military aid to Kyiv.

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said he hoped ministers would approve another 500 million euros (\$544m) in support.

A question mark has hung over how Hungary will vote because it has strong ties with Russia.

Irrespective, this is an important decision as a single "No" vote can stymie provision of relief to Ukraine. Hungary continues to be a hangover for the EU in general, given its closeness to Punt.

**EU approves €500m military aid for Ukraine; Germany starts deploying Patriot air defence to Poland<sup>3</sup>** - The €500m package was approved along with a further €45m for "non-lethal equipment" for the EU's military training mission for Ukraine, sources told Reuters. Hungary's foreign minister, Péter Szijjártó, said his country would not block the EU move.

## Sanctions

**Finland freezes €187 million worth of Russian assets**<sup>12</sup> - The Finnish Foreign Ministry has reported that €187 million worth of Russian assets has been frozen in the country due to sanctions imposed because of the Ukraine War, Yle reports.

“Those are real estate, shares, cars, yachts, aircraft: all sorts of valuable things,” Pia Saarivaara, a Foreign Ministry representative, says.

**Sanctions on the Wagner Group will have no effect: Kremlin**<sup>2</sup> - The Kremlin dismisses US sanctions on the Wagner Group, saying they will have no practical effect.

“I don’t think that in practical terms it has any significance for our country and even less for the Wagner private military company,” Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

The White House said on Friday that the mercenary group would be designated a significant transnational criminal organization and new sanctions against it would be announced this week.

Wagner founder Yevgeny Prigozhin wrote to the US national security spokesperson John Kirby to clarify what crime his forces were accused of.

**Russia's weekly oil exports slump back down after surge**<sup>5</sup> - Russia's seaborne crude exports fell back last week after surging in the previous seven days, contributing to the smallest inflow into the Kremlin’s war-chest since Moscow sent its forces into Ukraine.

Aggregate volumes of Russian crude slumped by 820,000 barrels a day, or 22%, to 2.98 million in the week to Jan. 20, giving up most of the previous week’s gain. The biggest drops were in flows from the Pacific ports, with smaller declines in Arctic and Black Sea exports. Baltic shipments were stable.

Despite the drop, four-week average flows, which smooth out peaks and troughs in weekly data, edged higher, remaining just above 3 million barrels a day for a second week. By this measure, seaborne crude exports were broadly in line with levels seen for most of the second half of 2022.

## Projection

**The West isn’t scared of Ukraine beating Russia anymore**<sup>7</sup> - Has the West lost its fear of a Ukrainian victory? – The collective West has long hesitated to provide Ukraine with offensive weapons that might appear to be escalatory to the Russian aggressor and precipitate a nuclear strike.

The dilemma here is that the effectiveness of Russia’s nuclear threats in producing Western vacillation and self-deterrence (understandable given possible dire consequences) incentivizes Moscow to repeat its threats. Thus Western policy has vacillated between offering Ukraine just enough military aid to avoid defeat and intentions to provide aid sufficient to achieve an outright victory. The overriding Western fear was that a notable Ukrainian victory, such as the anticipated liberation of Crimea, might provoke a nuclear strike. Accordingly, the West could not formulate clear objectives and a logical response to Russia’s aggression.

### Ramstein-9 and Ukraine

However, a tectonic shift in Western thinking has evidently emerged from the January 20 meeting of the Ramstein-9 Ukraine Defense Contact Group of fifty-one countries. The Group came out for supplying Ukraine with heavy **offensive** weapons in quantities sufficient for a Ukrainian victory, to be understood as the liberation of all Russian-occupied

territories back to the internationally recognized borders of 1991. A number of Western experts now believe the likelihood of a Russian nuclear strike to be quite small. China and India have spoken against a nuclear strike, and a worldwide economic embargo against Russia would stay the Kremlin's hand, not to mention military actions that the US or NATO countries might take.

Political opinion has changed the most in Germany, which, once having been the country most reluctant to send military aid, has now become one of the main providers. However, Germany has not agreed to allow allied states that had purchased stocks of its Leopard 2 tanks to transfer these tanks to Ukraine. The Leopards are the most readily available in large numbers and are the most suited to Ukrainian conditions. Several of the thirteen countries having the Leopard have offered to contribute some tanks; Poland is ready to send 100 or more immediately. The German government remains reluctant to approve transfers despite the latest Russian missile terror strike on a Ukrainian apartment building, this time in the city of Dnipro, where at least 44 civilians were killed and a larger number injured.

After impressive advances in the Kharkiv and Kherson regions in September and October, the AFU was unable to pursue further because of insufficient equipment and logistical capacity, rainy weather, and the successful Russian tactic of throwing masses of barely trained or untrained amnestied convicts and other social marginals against the AFU lines. This tactic, along with Western vacillation, allowed Russian President Vladimir Putin to hold out to his army and public the prospect of ultimate Russian victory.

While the AFU's advances were stalled, relentless Russian attacks on the Donbas towns of Bakhmut and Soledar in the east, though very costly and gaining little territory, succeeded in holding the AFU from launching offensives in the south. This also gave the Russians a breathing space to train more reserves. The Kremlin has projected an initial mobilization of 300,000 men, possibly growing to 500,000 or even more by the spring or summer, to be added to the approximately 150,000 or 200,000 already in Ukraine. A Ukrainian offensive in the spring will now be more difficult and costly than one would have been earlier.

Yet back in December, the top AFU general, Valeriy Zaluzhnyi, declared that in order to launch a major offensive, the AFU needed 300 additional main battle tanks, 500 modern artillery pieces, and 600 or more armored combat vehicles. The Ramstein-9 meeting has gone a long way toward meeting Zaluzhnyi's request, and seems to mark a turning point in Western policy.

The Ramstein-9 meeting is heavy with political significance. For the first time, the West is sending equipment that is **explicitly offensive**, and the quantities are large. The West seems to have overcome its fear of a Ukrainian victory and has made a commitment to support Ukraine that is probably irreversible. (**Comment** – And so too has Russian rhetoric increased commensurately. They are obviously concerned about this change in stance by the West and are making every noise possible to reach political decision-makers across EU states to try and persuade them to stop such supplies from reaching Ukraine).

The military significance is that the AFU will likely be able to reach the Azov Sea coast, thereby blocking the Russian land corridor to Crimea. The Russian strategic position in Ukraine's south is inherently poor, inasmuch as the Russian army is stretched over a front that is long and narrow. The AFU will attempt to find a weak point in the front; and, if successful, will cut the Russian army in half, with Russian forces west of the point, and south in Crimea, isolated from supplies from the east. (**Comment** – We have been saying this for some six months now).

The Russians are aware of this possibility. Consequently it appears that their attempts to fortify Melitopol in the west and Crimea to the south are only half-hearted. The main Russian efforts are likely to be in the Donbas, a political objective of Putin's long standing, and further north, in the Kharkiv and Chernihiv regions, which border Russia and offer favorable logistics. (**Comment** – Which is why Ukraine is targeting Svatove in the north where Russia's main rail supply lines run through. Capturing Svatove immediately forces the Kremlin to divert supplies through Crimea and Mariupol, both intrinsically unsafe and already subject to ongoing HIMARS assault).

But after nearly a year of the war, the Russian army is severely degraded. It has lost almost all of its initial complement of modern tanks and armored vehicles. Free-for-all artillery barrages have caused the artillery barrels to be badly worn and inaccurate. Many of the better junior officers and large parts of the professional army have been lost.

It seems that Russia is limited to three strategies. **One** strategy will be **continued missile terror attacks** on Ukrainian civilian areas. These attacks will occur particularly because Ukraine will have no defense against the supersonic Kh-22 missile for several months until a few Patriot anti-missile systems are installed and personnel trained for these. (Comment – we included this element in our *“Projection”* commentary yesterday). The **second** strategy is to take out of storage and refurbish old Soviet-era tanks and artillery equipment, but this might be technically difficult (**Comment** – Also included in yesterday’s comment)..

The **third** – main – strategy will be to throw masses of infantry against the AFU lines and to overcome these lines through sheer weight of numbers (**Comment** – Aha – also included in our commentary). This very costly tactic showed some success in Bakhmut and Soledar – success in the sense that the Russian infantry proved its ability to keep pressing despite phenomenal human losses. The Russian political and military commands are able to use this tactic because they are utterly indifferent to losses (**Comment** – See our comment under *“The basic difference between Russian and NATO approach to casualties in battle”* on page 7 above).

Much of the fighting and dying until now has been done by non-Russians from the east, such as Buryats and Udmurts, and from the south, such as Dagestanis, Ingushetians, and Kadyrovite Chechens. These are supplemented by Russian social marginals from prisons and from the poverty-stricken peripheries of Russia, along with soldiers from the so-called Luhansk and Donetsk Republics and by collaborators and civilians forcibly conscripted from other Ukrainian areas of occupation. Therefore the ethnic-Russian middle class of the large cities has been relatively untouched by mobilization, and the Kremlin has been able to manage any incipient anti-war sentiment.

### **What Happens Next?**

In sum, the stage is set for major bloodbaths this spring. There are some important imponderables. On the Ukrainian side, the list is shorter. The Ukrainians are fighting for their survival against explicit genocide by Russia, so for the Ukrainians, submission is not an option. Their determination to fight remains high, and their morale and capacity are improved by the latest tranche of offensive weapons. The Ukrainians are neither surprised nor intimidated by the ongoing Russian mobilizations, and some Ukrainian military experts think that steel will prevail over flesh, as was the usual historical pattern. The main imponderable could be Western fatigue over the longer term, though Ramstein-9 has indicated that fatigue is not an issue for the present.

The list of imponderables is longer on the Russian side. First, it is not certain that recruitment will be successful and that the army will be able to provide the soldiers adequately with personal equipment, vehicles, and weapons. A related question is whether Russia will be able to ramp up its war industries in view of sanctions on components and the general decline of the economy. Another factor is that ammunition stocks are considerably depleted and might not be replaceable.

A final, and perhaps key, imponderable on the Russian side is a political one concerning the conduct of the war itself. If the AFU blocks the Russian land bridge to Crimea, this will mean that, after a year of heavy fighting and expense, the Putin regime shall have gained almost nothing. At the least, this will cause recrimination within the Russian public, army, and government. Putin’s authority will inevitably decline, though by how much remains to be seen. (**Comment** – Again, these points were all raised in yesterday’s Update).

## Sources

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.mil.gov.ua/en/news/2022/09/22/the-total-combat-losses>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/jan/23>

<sup>4, 9, 10</sup> <https://www.newsweek.com/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.bing.com/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.skynews.com.au/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.19fortyfive.com/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://novayagazeta.eu/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.selecthub.com/>