

Conflict Update # 351

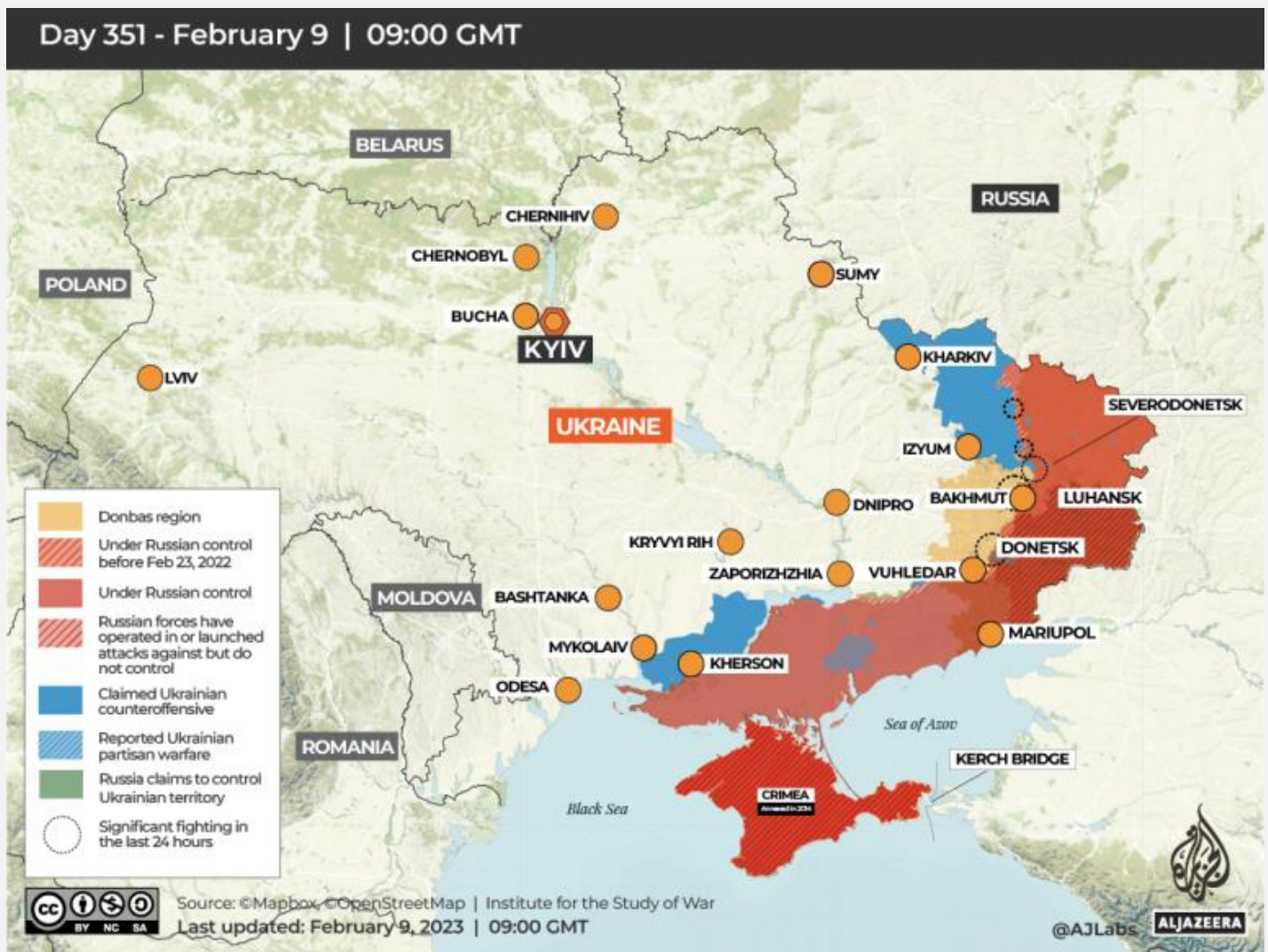
February 9th, 2023

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Conflict Assessment

Russian losses – 135,010 (910) soldiers killed, 3,255 (+2) enemy tanks, 6,468 (+10) armored combat vehicles, 2,244 (+8) artillery systems, 463 (+2) MLRS systems, 232 (+4) air defense systems, 295 (+0) warplanes, 285 (+0) helicopters, 1,967 (+6) UAVs of the operational-tactical level, 796 (+0) cruise missiles, 18 (+0) warships/cutters, 5,121 (+9) trucks and tankers, 4 Iskander Missile Launchers (+0), 239 fuel bowsers (+0) and 211 (+0) units of equipment.

Key Takeaways

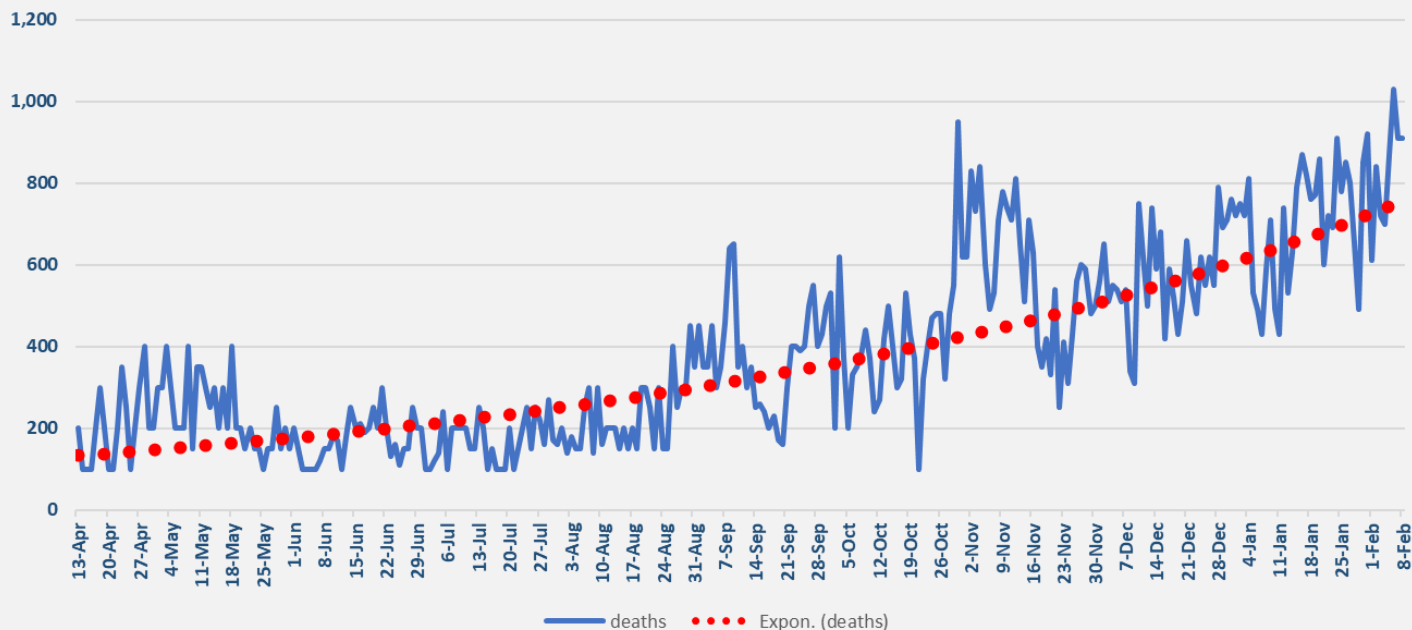


Battle for Bakhmut continues as Zelenskyy vows Ukraine will stand ground - The embattled Ukrainian city of Bakhmut remains under Kyiv's control, according to reports, as Ukraine's President, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, makes flying visits to some of the country's European allies.

The Donetsk city has long endured both heavy fighting and intense bombardment. Last week, Zelensky called the city a "fortress" and said Ukraine's armed forces will hold the city "for as long as we can."

"We resist [in Bakhmut]. And I thank every warrior who provides this resistance with his stamina," Zelensky said on Monday night.

Russian troop deaths by day



Ukraine blocks Russia from 'significant gains' as new offensive begins: ISW - Russia has "regained the initiative" by launching a new offensive in the Ukraine war, despite being blocked from making "significant gains," according to the Institute for the Study of War (ISW).

An ISW assessment published yesterday says that Moscow has started its "next major offensive" in Luhansk, a region of Ukraine that is already largely controlled by Russian forces. The report notes that "operations along the Svatove-Kreminna line" in western Luhansk have accelerated over the past week, leading to "marginal advances along the Kharkiv-Luhansk" border.

"The commitment of significant elements of at least three major Russian divisions to offensive operations in this sector indicates the Russian offensive has begun," the report says. "Even if Ukrainian forces are so far preventing Russian forces from securing significant gains."

Russia throws soldiers into Ukraine firing line to gain inches - Russia is resurrecting a tactic familiar from the Soviet Red Army in World War II: turning its troops into cannon fodder. "Everywhere is already strewn with corpses."

Russia preparing to attack – On Tuesday, Luhansk regional governor posted a battle update, detailing that Russian forces "are preparing to attack—we are preparing to retaliate."

Reports from Ukrainian sources, and analysis posted by Russian "milbloggers," indicates Russian military commanders may be "in a rush to launch the decisive offensive," US ISW think tank said on Monday.

This is likely designed to get ahead of Western military aid, including M1 Abrams, Leopard 2 and Challenger 2 main battle tanks, arriving in Ukraine, the ISW said.

It may also be an effort to avoid the "muddy spring season" from around April that "hindered Russian mechanized maneuvers in spring 2022," the think tank argued.

Russian forces step up attacks near Kreminna, says governor - A regional governor says Russian forces have significantly stepped up attacks near the town of Kreminna and are trying to break through Ukrainian defences.

"I can confirm that there has been a significant increase in attacks and shelling. And it is in the direction of Kreminna that they are trying to build on their success by pushing throughout defenders' defences," Serhiy Haidai, governor of the mostly occupied Luhansk region, told Ukrainian television.

"So far they have had no significant success, our defence forces are holding firmly there."

Breaking through Ukrainian lines would take Russian forces closer to the much larger city of Kramatorsk.

"(We need) heavy equipment and artillery ammunition – then we will not only be able to maintain the defence but also make a good counter-offensive operation," Haidai said.

Smashed by Ukrainian mines and artillery, Russia's winter offensive just ground to a halt outside Vuhledar - Outside Vuhledar, the Russian 72nd Brigade met the Ukrainian 72nd Brigade--and got beaten at least as badly as Russian marine brigades did in previous months.

Russia's widely-anticipated winter offensive has begun. Aiming to extend its control over eastern Ukraine's Donbas region, Russian troops are attacking north and south of Donetsk city.

In the south, around Vuhledar, the Russians' losses are just as steep—but they've made no clear gains that could justify the casualties. Vuhledar is turning into a meatgrinder for the Russian army, with enormous implications for the wider offensive.

The latest Russian attack on Vuhledar—a town with a pre-war population of just 14,000 that lies a mile north of Russian-held Pavlivka, 25 miles southwest of Donetsk—kicked off on Monday.

Seemingly a couple of battalions of Russian mechanized troops, together riding in a few dozen T-80 tanks and BMP-1 and BMP-2 fighting vehicles, advanced north.

The Ukrainian army's elite 72nd Mechanized Brigade is entrenched around Vuhledar. It has laid minefields along the main approaches from Pavlivka. Its drones surveil the front. Its artillery is dialed in.

The Russians know this. And the assault force took rudimentary precautions. Tank crews injected fuel into their exhausts to produce smokescreens. At least one T-80 carried a mine-plow.

But leadership and intelligence failures—and Ukraine's superior artillery fire-control—neutralized these measures. The Russian formation rolled into dense minefields. Destroyed tanks and BMPs blocked the advance. Vehicles attempting to skirt the ruined hulks themselves ran into mines.

Panicky vehicle commanders crowded so tightly behind the smoke-generating tanks that Ukrainian artillery, cued by drones, could score hits by firing at the head of the smoke. The Russians' daylong attack ended in heavy losses and retreat. The survivors left behind around 30 wrecked tanks and BMPs.

Vuhledar is further evidence of the downward spiral in Russian military effectiveness. Armies that lack robust recruitment, training and industrial bases tend to become steadily less effective as losses deepen.

Desperate to maintain the pace of operations, the army replaces any well-trained, well-equipped troops who've been hurt or killed with an equal number of new recruits—but without taking the time, or expending the resources, to train and equip those new troops to the previous standard.

So the army gets less and less competent even as it inducts more and more new personnel. Incompetence leads to even greater losses, which prompts the army to double down: draft more green troops, train them even less and hurry them to the front even faster than it did the previous recruits.

Apply this tragic model to Vuhledar and the Russian army's failures make more sense. For months, the Russian marine Corps' 155th and 40th Naval Infantry Brigades were responsible for the sector around Pavlivka. But the marines suffered devastating losses in repeated failed assaults starting last fall.

It's possible both marine brigades now are combat-ineffective. Their replacement appears to be the 72nd Motor Rifle Brigade, a new and inexperienced formation that belongs to the ill-fated 3rd Army Corps. The 72nd MRB formed in Russian Tatarstan and, as such, includes a high proportion of ethnic minorities. Cannon fodder to the Kremlin.

Russia attacks east Ukraine as milestone nears; Kyiv seeks arms - In the 50th week of the war, clashes intensify along the eastern front lines, as Kyiv claims heavy losses among Russian troops.

Russia appeared to make marginal territorial gains in Ukraine's eastern regions during the 50th week of the war, as it threw new recruits into the front lines to probe defences with widely dispersed attacks, sometimes with devastating casualties for its troops.

"We've observed that the Russian occupation forces are redeploying additional assault groups, units, weapons, and military equipment to the east," Ukrainian military intelligence representative Andriy Chernyak told the Kyiv Post.

More tanks, faster - Sensing the urgency of the situation, Ukraine's allies, which had held back promises of battle tanks until late January, were feverishly preparing the vehicles for combat and pledging more.

The first of four Canadian Leopard 2A4 tanks have arrived in Poland.

Germany, which had delayed announcing its first batch of 14 Leopard 2A4 tanks, additionally pledged 100 Leopard 1A5 tanks, bringing the total tanks allies have promised this year to 223.

Ukraine Has Exactly One T-80UK Command Tank. It Just Fought A Dangerous Solo Battle Near Bakhmut - The Ukrainian army has captured exactly one Russian T-80UK command tank that independent analysts have been able to confirm.

That sole tank, perhaps the rarest in Russia's wider war on Ukraine, just made a dramatic reappearance.

Speeding along the E40 highway just north of Bakhmut on or around Tuesday, the tank's three-man crew intercepted a Russian infantry force trying to make a daytime end-run around the Ukrainian garrison in Bakhmut.

But the T-80UK's impressive-seeming mission isn't actually good news for Ukraine. A tank shouldn't be operating all alone on a battlefield teeming with drones, attack helicopters and precision artillery.

The T-80UK is a 43-ton, turbine-powered T-80U with a suite of enhancements including extra radios, a better navigation system and a new thermal sight.

The turbine makes the tank fast. The extra radios lend the crew situational awareness: the commander can talk to more other units at the same time. Russia's Kirov tank plant in St. Petersburg developed the T-80UK in the 1990s, mostly for export. But the Russian army took delivery of a few of the speedy tanks with their distinctive dual radio antennae.

Russia loses 25 tanks in two days in deadly strike - Russian forces have lost dozens of tanks in the past two days, according to the Ukrainian military.

Writing on Facebook on Tuesday morning, the General Staff of Ukraine's Armed Forces attached a video of what appears to be Russian tanks being targeted by Ukrainian weapons systems, with the footage showing smoke and fire. The operational update then said 1,900 Russian soldiers had been killed in the past two days.

In a further update, the General Staff reported Russia's total tank losses since the beginning of its full-scale invasion in 2022 to be 3,245 tanks.

Ukrainian forces have long been capturing Russian weapons and tanks to be used against their original owners in the ongoing war. Back in October, the British defense ministry said that a "large proportion" of Kyiv's military hardware was now made up of captured Russian equipment.

Wagner troops filmed beating their commander with shovels - A Ukrainian drone captured footage of Wagner Group mercenaries savagely beating their wounded commander with what looks like shovels. Footage of the incident near the eastern city of Bakhmut shows the injured officer being dragged away from the battlefield before the three troops dump him near a barn and set about hitting him with the tools.

It's not clear what happened to the commander after the ordeal. A drone unit in Ukraine's Seneka special platoon captured the bleak footage, which was then shared on social media channels on Monday. Fighting has raged in Bakhmut for weeks, with Wagner founder Yevgeny Prigozhin believed to view the besieged city as a personal prize.

Russia has no combat power for large-scale offensive in "unrealistic terms" - ISW has stated that Russian troops are preparing an offensive operation in Ukraine, for which they lack combat power.

Source: ISW report from 7 February 2023

Details: Russian Defence Minister Shoigu held a press conference on the status of the war likely in an attempt to posture the Russian MoD as an effective and involved leadership apparatus as the Russian military prepares for a renewed major offensive in Ukraine.

Shoigu claimed that Russian forces are successfully developing operations near Bakhmut and Vuhledar and claimed that Russian troops have recently taken control of Soledar, Klishchiivka, Pidhorodne, Krasnopolivka, Blahodatne and Mykolaivka in the Bakhmut area and Lobkove in Zaporizhia Oblast.

ISW analysts say that Shoigu likely held this press conference in order to create the guise of formality and legitimacy for the Russian MoD as it continues efforts to reform the Russian military, prepare for a renewed offensive, and set conditions for prolonged operations in Ukraine.

ISW states Russian military command may be rushing to launch a large-scale offensive operation to conquer Donetsk Oblast in an unrealistic timeframe and likely without sufficient combat power.

The Russian nationalist information space is continuing to express worry over Russia's inability to sustain a rapid and multi-pronged decisive offensive operation on a deadline.

Russian state energy company Gazprom may be creating its own private security force, likely in an effort to normalize state-affiliated paramilitary groups and undermine private military companies (PMCs), the report states.

The Kremlin may be considering implementing some demands previously voiced by the Wagner Group financier, Yevgeny Prigozhin, to build rapport with other nationalist figures who advocated for similar policies. At the same time,

the Russian State Duma further formalized the institution of social benefit schemes in occupied territories of Ukraine in order to further consolidate administrative control of occupied areas.

Russia pouring troops into Eastern Ukraine ahead of new offensive - Russia is pouring reinforcements into Eastern Ukraine ahead of a new offensive that could begin shortly, reports suggest - but its plans are "unrealistic" as it doesn't have enough munitions or men to achieve a breakthrough, according to the UK MoD.

Serhiy Haidai, Ukrainian governor of Luhansk, said Russia is assembling troops and equipment in the area in preparation for an attempted offensive, echoing observations from analysts in recent days.

"We are seeing more and more [Russian] reserves being deployed in our direction, we are seeing more equipment being brought in," said Mr Haidai.

"They bring ammunition that is used differently than before - it is not round-the-clock shelling anymore. They are slowly starting to save, getting ready for a full-scale offensive. It will most likely take them 10 days to gather reserves. After Feb. 15 we can expect [this offensive] at any time," he told Ukrainian television.

Comment – Putin and the Kremlin are desperate to show something positive to Russian Main Street after a year-long battle of losses and territory concessions. He is also just as desperately trying to gain some advances ahead of the arrival of modern western weapons and technologically-advanced tracking and anti-missile platform and systems.

He has no answer against these as Ukrainian deployment thus far has been with conventional and slightly-dated equipment. Arrival of the new batches of tanks (Germany yesterday advised it is supplying the very latest A6 Leopard tanks to Ukraine), missiles and tracking systems will radically advance Ukrainian military prowess and capability.

He is also trying to up the attrition style of attack quite demonstrably by throwing thousands of untrained and extremely ill-equipped soldiers into the affray. Ukrainian commanders report that enemy forces are literally climbing over the bodies of their fallen comrades in being forced to advance against Ukrainian strongholds. Failing to advance see's them shot for desertion by Chechnyan execution squads.

He is simultaneously trying to gain some headway territorially, ahead of what is plainly a risky period, in order to occupy the parts of Luhansk and Donetsk Oblasts that remain unoccupied by Russian forces. Should Russia be forced to the negotiation table – and have possession of these oblasts in toto – then they can claim some form of victory, albeit pyrrhic, but in their eyes worthy of being trumpeted as having achieved Kremlin objectives.

Elon Musk's SpaceX firm bars Kyiv from using Starlink tech for drone control - SpaceX has limited Ukraine's ability to use its satellite internet service for military purposes - after reports that Kyiv has used it to control drones.

Early in the war, Ukraine was given thousands of SpaceX Starlink dishes - which connect to satellites and help people stay connected to the internet.

But it is also said to have used the tech to target Russian positions with drones - which SpaceX says goes against the service agreement.

Ukraine is yet to comment on the move.

The Starlink technology was "never meant to be weaponized," SpaceX president Gwynne Shotwell said at an event in Washington DC on Wednesday.

She made reference to Ukraine's alleged use of Starlink to control drones, and stressed that the equipment had been provided for humanitarian use. Unmanned aircraft have played an important role in the war, having been used by Kyiv to search out Russian troops, drop bombs and counter Moscow's own drone attacks.

Comment – What is going on with Musk and his council? He waffles this way and that. He needs to tell the world how Putin and the Kremlin are not weaponizing whatever they have in their armory. Why then is he singling out Kyiv in this manner?

Comments, Developments and Reports

On the road to EU accession, Volodymyr Zelensky has already scored points' - To seal its membership in a democratic Europe, whose values it defends, Ukraine hopes in the longer term to join the European Union, if possible as early as 2026 as Zelensky repeatedly stressed at the Kyiv summit on February 3 with Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Council President Charles Michel.

Russia warns of 'consequences' following Nord Stream report - Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov says there will be consequences for the United States after a blog by a US investigative journalist alleged Washington was behind the blast that damaged the Nord Stream gas pipelines.

Ryabkov also told the state-run RIA Novosti news agency that Seymour Hersh's report was not a surprise for Russia, who has repeatedly said the West was behind the explosions.

Earlier on Thursday, Vyacheslav Volodin, the chairman of the Russian State Duma, said that the report should become the basis for an international investigation.

The White House on Wednesday dismissed the Hersh report, which said an attack on the pipelines was carried out last September at the direction of President Joe Biden.

Zelenskyy addressed the European parliament on Thursday morning, saying Ukraine "will join the European Union" and thanking the bloc's members for their support during Russia's invasion.

French president, Emmanuel Macron, said Paris would "continue the efforts" to deliver arms to Kyiv, adding that France was determined to help Ukraine towards "victory, peace and Europe". "Russia cannot and must not win," he said, adding that "the future of Europe" was at stake in Ukraine. The German chancellor, Olaf Scholz, said it was clear that Moscow would not win, and assured Ukraine its future was in the EU, saying Ukraine was part of the "European family". "Putin will not achieve his goals – not on the battlefield and not through a dictated peace."

Putin & Russia

Russians are beginning to question aims of Putin's war - Nearly a year after Vladimir Putin's full-scale invasion of neighboring Ukraine started, Russians are beginning to question the aims of what the leader still calls a "special military operation."

That's according to Margarita Simonyan, editor-in-chief of the state-sponsored RT. She was broadcast on state TV responding to Russians complaining that they don't understand Putin's real objectives in his war against Ukraine.

A clip of her remarks was published on Twitter by BBC journalist Francis Scarr late Tuesday.

"I don't know whether to laugh or cry. RT boss Simonyan responds to Russians complaining that they don't understand the invasion's real aims," he tweeted as a caption. "She claims Putin deliberately chose the vague aims of 'demilitarization' and 'denazification' so Russia had flexibility as things unfolded."

And a few weeks into the war, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said the Kremlin's goal was to achieve the "full liberation of the Donetsk and Luhansk republics," which make up Ukraine's eastern Donbas region.

"What are our objectives? Well, let me try to explain," said Simonyan. "That phrasing which is kind of complicated and vague: denazification and demilitarization. It's not complicated and vague for no reason.

"It's deliberately complicated and vague, because the objectives—as you remember when the president made his address—three objectives were declared. Of those objectives, only one was clear, substantive and unquestionable. The liberation of [the] Donbas—of the [self-proclaimed] DPR and LPR," she added.

Simonyan said Russia has now "gone further because our new regions—Zaporizhzhia and Kherson—cannot be given up under any circumstances and must be liberated of course." She was referring to two of four partially-occupied Ukrainian territories Putin illegally proclaimed to have annexed in September 2022 following "sham" referendums.

Russian prisoner recruitment 'completely stopped', says Wagner chief - Russia's Wagner mercenary group has stopped recruiting prisoners to fight in Ukraine, its founder Yevgeny Prigozhin has said.

"The recruitment of prisoners by the Wagner private military company has completely stopped," Prigozhin said in a response to a request for comment from a Russian media outlet published on social media.

"We are fulfilling all our obligations to those who work for us now," he said.

Wagner began recruiting prisoners in Russia's sprawling penal system in the summer of 2022, with Prigozhin, a catering entrepreneur who served nine years in prison during Soviet Union times, offering convicts a pardon if they survived six months in Ukraine.

Top Putin ally says he 'will not hide' intention to invade Poland anymore - Ramzan Kadyrov, a key Putin ally, has begun rattling off threats about attacking Poland after Ukraine.

Kadyrov, head of Chechnya, suggested Monday that Russia should "denazify and demilitarize" Poland next.

"What if, after the successful completion of the NMD, Russia begins to denazify and demilitarize the next country? After all, after Ukraine, Poland is on the map! I will not hide that I personally have such an intention," Kadyrov said on Telegram. "I personally have such an intention, and I have repeatedly stated that the fight against Satanism should continue throughout Europe and, first of all, on the territory of Poland."

Kadyrov warned Tuesday that the time has come for the West to fall to its knees before Russia, predicting that the so-called "special military operation" in Ukraine, would be over by the end of 2023.

"The special [military] operation will be over before the end of this year. European countries will admit they have been wrong, the West will fall to its knees, and, as usual, European countries will have to cooperate with the Russian Federation in all spheres," Kadyrov said, according to TASS. "There should not and will never be an alternative to that."

Putin's inner circle plotting coup, former CIA official says: 'it'll happen all of a sudden and he'll be dead' - Russian President Vladimir Putin is reportedly facing the threat of his trusted lieutenants clandestinely plotting to overthrow him if his Ukraine invasion turns out to be a failure, it was reported in June 2022.

Putin's close aides could attempt a coup in a very secretive manner so that they are not caught by the president, former CIA Moscow station chief Daniel Hoffman said, as reported by the Sun at the time.

"It'll happen all of a sudden. And he'll be dead," he said.

The Ukraine invasion, according to the former U.S. intelligence official, may prove to be Putin's undoing. His inner circle could be gearing up for a mutiny to seize control of the conflict, especially Russia is unable to gain the upper hand in the war, he added.

'Ultra-patriots' may try to overthrow Putin because of his army's failures in Ukraine, says Russian MP -

A leading Russian MP said that his country's "ultra-patriots" could try to overthrow President Vladimir Putin in frustration with their army's performance in Ukraine.

Oleg Matveychev — an MP with Russia's largest political party, United Russia, which backs Putin — said in an interview that the biggest threat to Putin is now supporters of the Ukraine war who are unhappy with the progress of the conflict, The Times of London reported.

He said that for Putin "the situation is not so critical yet, but 2023 will be very dangerous," the Times reported.

Matveychev is often referred to as the Kremlin's "spin doctor" due to frequent comments on behalf of top government officials. However, his latest comments are unlikely to please those in the Kremlin.

He said that "ultra-patriots" in the country will likely put forward a candidate to run against Putin in next year's presidential elections, when Putin is set to run for a fifth term, adding the candidate would likely follow the playbook from a series of protests in Ukraine in 2013, which ended in Ukrainian President Yanukovich, who was allied with Russia, being ousted.

He referred to this as following "the Maidan scenario," referring to Independence Square in Kyiv, where those protests largely took place. "An ultra-patriotic Maidan with a light dose of leftism, talk about corruption — these are a means to bring people out, and the trigger could be anything," he said, highlighting some of the battlefield setbacks in Ukraine.

Putin has become increasingly isolated from the rest of the world since his invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, with the West imposing further sanctions on Russia and even his longtime allies criticizing the war.

In Russia he's also faced backlash from pro-war figures, who are unhappy with the army's performance and want even more brutal tactics in Ukraine. A former Putin speechwriter said last month that a coup could happen in Russia as military generals are frustrated at their troops' defeats.

"As problems pile up in the country and the army, that the authorities are unable to solve, Putin is more steadily transforming in people's eyes from a great strategist to an ordinary, second-rate dictator," the speechwriter said.

Containment

UK to look into sending combat planes to Ukraine - British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak asked Defense Secretary Ben Wallace to look into which warplanes the U.K. can provide to Ukraine, after meeting with President Volodymyr Zelensky in London on Feb. 8.

After his surprise visit to the British capital, Zelensky thanked the U.K. for its support and asked Western allies for combat jets, saying Ukraine needs them to defeat the Russian forces. "We have freedom, give us wings to protect it," the Ukrainian leader told the U.K. parliament.

Sunak's spokesperson said Wallace is "actively looking at whether we send jets" to Ukraine but added that this is a "long-term solution."

Sunak also said that the U.K. will train pilots to operate NATO-standard fighter jets and will receive the first batch of Ukrainian trainees in the spring. They will be taught to operate British planes.

Just over a week ago, the British government said it was "not practical" to send jets to Ukraine, as they are extremely complicated pieces of equipment that take months to learn to fly.

NATO as a whole must decide on fighter jets: Poland - The Polish prime minister says NATO must take any decision on supplying fighter jets to Ukraine as a whole, and Poland will not be the first to provide such aircraft.

Zelenskyy has urged allies to supply combat aircraft to help Ukraine fight back against Russian forces.

“Our position is clear, we can only act within the entire formation of NATO,” Mateusz Morawiecki told reporters.

“We will not be the first ones to hand over the fighter jets, but we will respond positively, provided that those who have the most of these jets will be able to give them to Ukraine.”

Morawiecki said Poland did not have enough fighter jets to be the first to supply them to Ukraine and that it could not take steps that would weaken its security.

Ukraine needs infantry fighting vehicles more than tanks - Out of all the types of armored vehicles, Ukraine needs the tanks that have attracted so much media attention in recent weeks the least, says Michael Kofman, a leading Western analyst and director of Russian Studies at the Center for Naval Analysis in Arlington, Virginia.

Source: BBC News Russian service, referring to Kofman's podcast, War on The Rocks

Details: The expert says that Ukraine needs infantry fighting vehicles (IFVs) much more than tanks, and in large quantities. The fact that hundreds of so-called "tank killers", Bradley IFVs, have been promised to Ukraine is more important than the Leopards.

Kofman says that IFVs are needed both to repel the upcoming Russian offensive and for a counteroffensive by Ukraine later – probably in late spring or early summer.

The analyst noted that "Ukraine can expect to lose hundreds of vehicles" during any offensive operations, even the most successful, but, in his opinion, new supplies will cover these losses.

Kofman also noted that Russia was unlucky that the winter in Ukraine and other European countries was warmer than usual. This has led to the fact that the power required in Ukraine was lower, as well as gas use in European countries.

Meanwhile, the expert suggests, the number of missiles that Russia is firing at Ukraine during bombardments "is beginning to decrease to the number of missiles that they can produce in a month".

Background:

- On 31 January, the US announced that it had sent the first batch of more than 60 Bradley infantry fighting vehicles to Ukraine.
- On 25 January, the German government officially announced the decision to transfer Leopard 2 main battle tanks to the Armed Forces of Ukraine and to allow re-export to other countries that also want to do so.
- US President Biden confirmed his intention to transfer 31 M1 Abrams tanks to Ukraine, which is equal to one Ukrainian battalion, to strengthen its defence capabilities against the backdrop of Russian aggression. The USA announced that, together with the tanks, they would provide training to the Ukrainian military and supply spare parts as soon as possible.

Russian embassy warns London against sending fighter jets - The Russian embassy in Britain has warned London against sending fighter jets to Ukraine, according to Russia's TASS news agency.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy visited the United Kingdom on Wednesday, calling on allies for fighter jets to help fight Russian forces. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said “nothing is off the table”, including combat aircraft for Kyiv.

In a statement, the Russian embassy said the “bloodshed, next round of escalation, and resulting military and political consequences for the European continent and the entire world” would be on London’s conscience if the UK sent fighter jets.

“Russia will find a way to respond to any unfriendly steps taken by the British side,” TASS quoted the embassy as saying.

Russia Releases Bizarre Statement About Targeting UK After Zelenskyy's Visit - It warned that if Ukraine received fighter jets, the "consequences" for the whole world will be "on the United Kingdom's hands".

The Russian embassy statement was still chilling rhetoric following Zelenskyy’s trip to London yesterday.

In a lengthy statement the Russian embassy dubbed Zelenskyy’s claims about fighting for freedom to be “overtly hypocritical.”

It even alleged that Westminster was aware of “the repressive habits of the deeply corrupted Ukrainian elite,” particularly with the Russian-speaking population.

The embassy also criticized the “hasty visit”, mocking Zelenskyy as the “Ukrainian ‘commander-in-chief’” and his “theatrical performance in Westminster”.

It then even referenced former prime minister Boris Johnson, who has been very vocal in his support for Ukraine even since leaving Downing Street.

It said Johnson told LBC radio that sending military supplies to Ukraine is a “massive down payment on future security” – and said this meant “Ukrainians are being sent en masse to die for other countries’ strategic interests.”

US allies bordering Russia are buying up HIMARS, weapons that have devastated Putin's forces in Ukraine, and longer-range rockets and missiles for them – With the latest approved sale of HIMARS systems to Poland, it would become the latest eastern European country that borders Russia to secure the much-celebrated HIMARS. The State Department last year approved a sale of HIMARS to Estonia, which borders mainland Russia. Lithuania — which, along with Poland, borders the tiny militarized Russian exclave of Kaliningrad — also secured a deal with the US government. And Latvia, which is also a Russian neighbor, has previously requested to buy the weapon. Lithuania and Estonia both requested the ATACMS and extended range GMLRS as well.

Ukrainian forces have found success with the HIMARS on the battlefield since they arrived in the early summer of 2022, using its GPS-guided rockets to target Russian sites like ammunition depots, command posts, and bridges. The weapons were also critical in helping Ukraine recapture territory around the southern Kherson region.

Sanctions

Russian exports in line with domestic laws, says China - When asked if China had exported navigation equipment and fighter jet parts to Russia, a commerce ministry spokesperson said China has always required its firms to abide by domestic laws.

On Saturday, The Wall Street Journal reported that Chinese state-owned defence companies had provided technology that Russia’s military needs, citing Russian customs records.

“The Chinese government has always required enterprises to strictly comply with national export control and other laws and regulations ... and ensure that relevant exports are in line with China’s national security interests and international interests,” a commerce spokesperson Shu Jueting told a regular briefing.

China's Anti-Foreign Sanctions Law, which came into force in June 2021, grants Chinese companies a legal basis for side-stepping international sanctions that harm Chinese entities and result in them only having to comply with domestic laws and regulations.